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Sight and Knowledge Disconnected:
The Epistemology of the Visual and the Ideological Gaze
in the Novels of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf

by

Kaoru Urano

A thesis submitted to Durham University
for a PhD in English Studies

§ Abstract §

One of the ways to understand literary modernism is to see it as a response to the crisis of Western ocularcentrism. First taking up E. M. Forster as a main figure and later shifting its point of focus to Virginia Woolf and finally to a contemporary author Zadie Smith, this dissertation examines how literature can respond when our long-standing belief in the sight's ability to reach knowledge is challenged. Forster's novels, written at the dawn of the twentieth century, can be read as a remarkably honest record of the age's epistemological anxiety and puzzlement at the recognition that the equation of seeing and knowing in its familiar Cartesian guise was hardly possible any more. The dim feeling of unfitness that Forster felt about realism at the beginning of his career seemed to accompany him to the end, until he felt that he

could not produce any more novels after A Passage to India (1924). For Woolf, on the other hand, whose prime as a novelist came later than that of Forster, this condition appeared not so much as a “crisis” of ocularcentrism but rather as a stimulus to invent her new feminist aesthetics of the visual, which is positively assisted by the concept of sight as physical. It culminates with Lily Briscoe the painter’s effort to seize her vision in To the Lighthouse (1927), onto which Woolf may have projected her own venture, which was to grow out of the realist method of writing. The last chapter casts light on a moment that could be called an emergence of a new ocularcentrism by exploring Smith’s latest novel On Beauty (2005), which is based on Forster’s Howards End (1910) and prominently focuses on the meaning that the act of seeing can have in our postmodern world.

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§ List of Abbreviations §

<u>A</u>	Henry James. <u>The Ambassadors</u> .
<u>AN</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>Aspects of the Novel</u> .
<u>AS</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>Arctic Summer</u> .
<u>HE</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>Howards End</u> .
<u>JR</u>	Virginia Woolf. <u>Jacob's Room</u> .
<u>LJ</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>The Longest Journey</u> .
<u>OB</u>	Zadie Smith. <u>On Beauty</u> .
<u>PI</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>A Passage to India</u> .
<u>PL</u>	Henry James. <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u> .
<u>RV</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>A Room with a View</u> .
<u>TL</u>	Virginia Woolf. <u>To the Lighthouse</u> .
<u>WAF</u>	E. M. Forster. <u>Where Angels Fear to Tread</u> .

§ Statement of Copyright §

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§ Acknowledgements §

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Introduction

“The cow is there,” said Ansell, lighting a match and holding it out over the carpet. No one spoke. He waited till the end of the match fell off. Then he said again, “She is there, the cow. There, now.”

“You have not proved it,” said a voice.

“I have proved it to myself.”

“I have proved to myself that she isn’t,” said the voice. “The cow is *not* there.” Ansell frowned and lit another match.

“She is there for me,” he declared. “I don’t care whether she’s there for you or not. Whether I’m in Cambridge or Iceland or dead, the cow will be there.”

It was philosophy. They were discussing the existence of objects. Do they exist only when there is someone to look at them? or have they a real existence of their own? It is all very interesting, but at the same time it is difficult. Hence the cow. She seemed to make things easier. She was so familiar, so solid, that surely the truths that she illustrated would in time become familiar and solid also. Is the cow there or not? This was better than deciding between objectivity and subjectivity. So at Oxford, just at the same time, one was asking, “What do our rooms look like in the vac?” (LJ 3)

The opening scene of E. M. Forster’s most autobiographical novel, The Longest Journey (1907), describes the Cambridge students discussing a philosophical problem at the outset of the twentieth century. Holding up the light, the longstanding metaphor of truth and intellect in philosophy,¹ Stewart Ansell is refuting the empirical idea that everything exists only when perceived by somebody. Latent in this situation one might find a curious paradox: while the light of the match is supposed to guarantee that vision (which is traditionally thought to be the “noblest” of senses) leads one to certain knowledge of the world,² Ansell, holding it up, is claiming

¹ See Hans Blumenburg, “Light as a Metaphor of Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation,” Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, ed. David Michael Levin (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 30-62.

² Hans Jonas, “The Nobility of Sight,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 14:4 (1964) 507-19.

that things also exist when there is no perceiving human eye. The sense of disconnection vaguely felt here is, then, met by the unconvinced response from the audience: they wait till the match is exhausted, but in their eyes, the young would-be philosopher has not proved anything, while Ansell himself insists that it is proven to himself. This is another layer of disconnection, that is, the anxiety that there may not be a common ground reached by all. For Ansell, the cow has real existence apart from perception, but for others, it does not; and they find no solution enabling them to objectively decide which is correct and which is wrong. Although the narrative soon shifts to describe the dreamy nature of Rickie the protagonist and the warmth of Cambridge, the reader is thus introduced to an epistemological doubt that was felt by Forster's contemporaries—some ambiguous gap widening between the object and the subject, or, the external world and our perception of it. The loss of the absolute source of knowledge is also evident in the following part: "The fire was dancing, and the shadow of Ansell, who stood close up to it, seemed to dominate the little room. He was still talking, or rather jerking, and he was still lighting matches and dropping their ends upon the carpet" (LJ 5). This scene can be taken as a distant allusion to Plato's allegory of the sun and the cave in The Republic.³ Now, however, the light (the fire) is not located far enough above to be transcendental; instead it is burning inside the room, and people stare at it directly, but the place is still dominated by the shadow. Lacking any outside authoritative legitimation, therefore, this may be a

³ Plato, The Republic, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 220-23.

picture of the world where everything is relative and personal. The match is struck again and again, perhaps not entirely in vain, but in order to assure certain things to certain people only (in this case, to Ansell), and not to all people in all possible worlds.

The philosophical conversation that we encounter at the beginning of The Longest Journey reflects the theme of G. E. Moore's important treatise, "The Refutation of Idealism" (1903).⁴ Leaving behind the main current in British philosophical scene around that time, Moore attacks the premise of modern Idealism, that the universe is spiritual and that there is correspondence between it and human consciousness. It is especially Berkeley's empirical thesis, "*esse is percipi*," that Moore criticizes as a foundation of Hegelian Idealism. Moore thinks that, if perception (both sensation and thought included) is, as the empiricist argues, something unique and distinct from anything else, it cannot be perfectly the same as reality. Thus pointing out the ambiguity of the copula "is," he argues that the idealist view of the object of sensation and the sensation of it as indistinguishably connected is contradictory to the statement that experience is different from all other things. Our sensation of the object—including "knowing," "being aware of," and "experiencing" it—cannot be distinguished from the object that causes it, except that it involves our consciousness, and to explain what this consciousness is is beyond our reach. Therefore, Moore concludes, there is no such question of

⁴ G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," Mind 48 (1903) 433-53. For this article's influence on The Longest Journey, see S. P. Rosenbaum, Edwardian Bloomsbury, The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group, Vol. 2 (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994) 226-58.

how we are to get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations, for merely to have sensation is already to *be* outside that circle. Moore in this way opens up a possibility of a new epistemology which admits reality not only to our subjective experience but also to the world of objects unmediated by human consciousness.

As it is particularly “sight” among five senses that is featured in The Longest Journey (whether the cow’s existence depends on one’s looking at it or not), in “The Refutation of Idealism,” too, the examples employed to support the argument are predominantly visual: they are about the perception of color. Moore points out that, as a color in the material sense, “yellow” or “blue” or “green” exists independent of our perception of it. Then he moves on to his second inquiry: we know that the sensation of blue differs from that of green, but how? Since both are sensations, they must have something in common, and supposedly the common thing is our consciousness involved in each experience. If this is the case, it cannot be anything other than blue and green themselves, the colors which cause the sensation, that make them distinguishable. Behind Moore’s impulse to thus separate the subject and object of visual experience, Maggie Humm sees a feeling of discontinuity between things as they are said to be and things as we actually experience them. Humm thinks that what Moore’s speculation pinpoints is the gap between our modes of cognition, the socially agreed designation “blue” for a particular material hue, and our subjective experience, and that this difficulty of seeing and knowing

informs Moore's philosophical enquiries.⁵ Indeed, in the course of his argument, Moore often appeals to the felt gap between the Idealistic view of the universe and the one that is ordinarily assumed. For example, at the beginning he says that chairs and tables and mountains seem very different from us, but if the whole universe is declared to be spiritual, it is meant to assert that they are in some way neither lifeless nor unconscious, as they certainly seem to be. Moore is cautious of the trap that he thinks philosophy easily falls into: "when engaged in the intricacies of philosophic discussion, we are apt to overlook the vastness of the difference between the idealistic view and the ordinary view of the world."⁶

The inadequacy of the existing philosophy to explain our perceptual (especially visual) experience that is captured by Moore and put into a fictional episode by Forster can be located in the wider historical context of the wane of ocularcentrism in the twentieth century. As critics such as Richard Rorty and Martin Jay have meticulously examined in their studies,⁷ Western philosophy has a long tradition of privileging sight as the most trustworthy sense since the ancient Greek age. It is Plato who first advanced the problem of seeing and knowing, drawing a line between the appearance and the truth of the world. Despite his general distrust of the physical senses, he labeled sight as privileged by conceptualizing two

⁵ Maggie Humm, Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2002) 3. Humm then briefly analyzes Virginia Woolf's short story "Blue and Green" as a sketch of the relativity of visual perception, which shows a direct influence of Moore's epistemology.

⁶ Moore, "Refutation" 434.

⁷ Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).

different types of seeing: “sensible” vision (the actual sight, which is illusory and brings about false knowledge) and “intelligible” vision (the inner eye of the mind helping us see the world of Ideas and acknowledge Truth).⁸ It seems that this basic distinction has survived ever since, though each time it accompanies different theorizations according to the age’s epistemological necessity.

For René Descartes, with whom the concept of modern subjectivity was born, it is deeply complicit with the mind/body dualism that he established in order to vindicate our ability to reach objective knowledge of the world. The experiment Descartes proposes in Optics (1637) to see how vision works shows his effort to eliminate the physical factor from the operation of human sight.⁹ First, one should take the eye of a newly dead person, or failing that, of an ox or some other large animal, and replace the membranes with some white material thin enough to let light pass through, such as a piece of

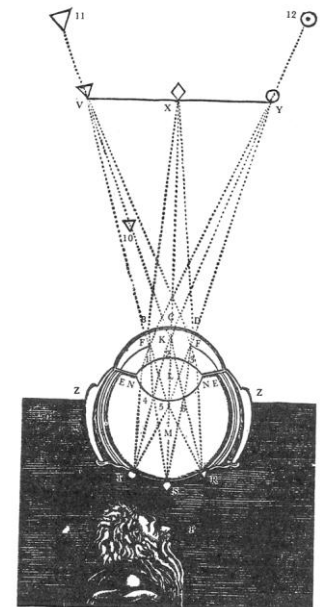


Fig. 1

⁸ In Phaedrus Plato sets Socrates to say that seeing a beautiful object may sometimes help us to remember the world of Ideas: “. . . the Form of Beauty may be more readily recollected than the other Forms, since its image is discerned by sight, the keenest of our sense.” Plato’s Phaedrus, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1952) 92. In The Republic the ascent to perfect knowledge begins with the perception of the beautiful body, and with the metaphor of the cave and the sun reaches the climactic synthesis of truth, good, and beauty. Plato thus started to speak of a distinction between two kinds of sight—a sensible sight and an intelligible sight—and it can be argued that in his philosophy the modern concept of the ‘Image’ finds its origin. See Daniela Carpi, ed., Why Plato?: Platonism in Twentieth Century English Literature (Heidelberg: U of Heidelberg P, 2005) 11. See also Jay 27-29 for the ambiguity of the Greek celebration of sight (it is willing to admit the uncertainty about the actual eye though there is Aristotle’s exceptional defense of it).

⁹ René Descartes, The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, et al. Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 152-75.

paper or an egg-shell. If this eye in the hole of a specially made shutter is positioned facing various objects, and an observer then looks at the white body, he/she finds there a picture of those objects. Descartes contends that this is exactly the same as how the sight of a living person works as he indicates with a figure.¹⁰ Without the membranes and nerves to connect it to the human body, the eye is now scarcely more than an inanimate lens situated in the “specially made shutter,” and a man lacking eyes (which is suggested by his dark eye sockets) is standing behind and seeing *through* it. What Descartes tries to show by this peculiar model is that, above all, it is not the physical eye itself but *the mind of the viewer* that actually looks upon the object: he contends, “it is the soul which sees, and not the eye; and it does not see directly, but only by the means of the brain.”¹¹ The brain and the nervous system are regarded as impediments thrust between the world and the soul, which can be disturbed by some physical disorders but, if left alone, always sees the world as it truly is. By thus drawing a line between the physiological function of the eye and the mind (or the soul) that inspects the image presented by it, Descartes puts forward a system of vision that infallibly leads us to objective knowledge. This model is, actually, not a thoroughly unique invention of Descartes, but rather a theoretical response to the general Renaissance scheme of rationalizing sight, of which the laws of perspective in visual art are probably the direct source of inspiration for the philosopher.¹² This Renaissance model

¹⁰ See “Fig 2” on the right page, which is taken from Descartes 171.

¹¹ Descartes 172.

¹² For Descartes and perspectivalism, see Jay 69-82.

maintains its authority throughout the Enlightenment discourse of the following century, with its more rational Cartesian version still underpinning the belief that our knowledge of the world consists of nothing but our experience.

A major change arrived in the nineteenth century. Kant brought about a “Copernican revolution” with his declaration that all we can have is our subjective experience of the world and there is no way to get outside of it and know things in themselves. His philosophy and the Romantic aesthetics of the self instigated by it are both marked with their lack of thirst for the objective knowledge and their alternative interest in our subjective response to sense experience. The nineteenth century also saw the rapid progress in technology and empirical science, which revealed the visual field inaccessible to the human eye and turned our vision itself into the object of physiological study.¹³ This has the effect of foregrounding the physical nature of our sight, which Descartes tried to suppress as far as possible, and eventually leads to what Jay calls “the denigration of vision” in the twentieth century. However, it first generated the euphoric exploration of new visual experiences through various optical toys.¹⁴ In painting, Impressionist practice flourished as a keen attempt to transfix the fleeting, ephemeral nature of an image that the artist’s eye individually

¹³ Sara Danius, The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) seeks the root of “the crises of the senses” that she finds in many modernist literary texts in the rapid technological development from the mid-nineteenth century. See especially her chapter two, in which she discusses the aesthetics of the autonomous eye in relation to the advent of the X-ray, a device which radically rearranged the boundary between visible/invisible (55-90).

¹⁴ For a detailed account of the popularity of optical toys in the nineteenth century, see Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1992) 97-136.

caught.¹⁵

Moore's treatise significantly breaks from this Idealist vein of nineteenth century philosophy and aesthetics and admits reality to the external world unmediated by human perception. In the field of aesthetics, too, the Bloomsbury Group forms a similar theorization: the Post-Impressionist aesthetics of Roger Fry and Clive Bell is critical of the ever-expanding subjective vision in Impressionist paintings and instead seeks more solid, abstract truth latent in reality, to which they give a Platonic epithet of "Form."¹⁶ In their impulse to reach out to things lying beyond our sense perception, we can find yet another venture to ensure sight the ability to grasp the world objectively, perhaps as a reaction against, or recoil from, the wholesale approval of the subjective visual experience in the previous century.

As an author who published all of his novels in the first quarter of twentieth century, no doubt under the strong if indirect influence of the thoughts of Moore and his friends' formalist aesthetics, Forster also shows an agile response toward this problem of seeing and knowing in his verbal medium. It is interesting that, complaining to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (who first recommended him to become a novelist) about his initial struggle to write fiction, Forster says that he thinks he has "the photo-graphic gift" but doesn't mean to use it unreservedly, for he has

¹⁵ Bernard Denvir, Impressionism: The Painters and the Paintings (London: Studio, 1991). Paul Smith, Impressionism: Beneath the Surface (London: Weidenfield 1995).

¹⁶ Clive Bell, Art, 1914 (London: Chatto, 1949). Roger Fry, Vision and Design, 1920. Ed. J. B. Bullen (Mineola: Dover, 1998). See also Bernard Denvir, Post-Impressionism (London: Thames, 1992).

“tried to invent realism, if you see what I mean: instead of copying incidents & characters that I have come across, I have tried to imagine others equally commonplace, being under the impression that this was art.”¹⁷ More than twenty years later, after the enormous success of A Passage to India (1924), he wrote as follows: “I cant [*sic*] believe there will be anoth[er] novel. . . . The legs of my camera could not stand the strain.”¹⁸ This prediction turned out to be real, and Forster produced no more novels. It may be significant that, both at the beginning and the end of his career as a novelist, Forster compares his method of writing to the act of taking pictures, and professes his uneasiness that it may not be sufficient to describe the world in which he inhabits.

In The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture (2001), Karen Jacobs analyzes literary modernism from the standpoint that Jay has carved out for philosophy, that is, as a response to the crisis in ocularcentrism.¹⁹ In her theorization of the modernist inquiry about the authority of the Cartesian disembodied observer, she mentions that the literary imagination of the age was drawn to the epistemology of photography, onto which the philosophical erosion of the positivist equation between seeing and knowing seemed to be displaced. As Jacobs points out, however, the photographic exercise itself embedded both scientific and aesthetic dimensions from the beginning, and inherent in modernist

¹⁷ Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank, eds., Selected Letters of E. M. Forster: Volume One 1879-1920 (London: Collins, 1983) 51.

¹⁸ Quoted in David Bradshaw, introduction, Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster, ed. David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 1-7 at 1.

¹⁹ Karen Jacobs, The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture (Ithaca: Cornell, 2001).

literature is the tension between an impulse to salvage the reliable visual model of knowledge and a recognition that the image of the world it cuts out is always to some extent subjective: “[w]hat distinguishes the *modernist* literary response from its predecessors stems from a *crisis* of belief in the continuity between seeing and knowing, and a commensurate cognizance of the subjective mediations of embodied visuality.”²⁰

Forster’s doubt about his “photo-graphic gift” may also be discussed in this framework that Jacobs sets up for discussing modernist literature. This dissertation aims to examine Forster’s visual consciousness from diverse points of view. As for his specific response to and use of photography in his works, Graham Smith’s ‘Light that Dances in the Mind’: Photographs and Memory in the Writings of E. M. Forster and His Contemporaries came out in 2007 and offers many insightful suggestions.²¹ Nonetheless, compared to his friend and contemporary novelist Virginia Woolf, on whose visual strategy there is already a large amount of study, Forster’s visual imagination, especially how he deals with the age’s anxiety about seeing and knowing, still remains almost unexplored. That Forster too is an intensely “visual” writer can be seen in the simple fact that five out of six novels by him have been put into films and won world-wide recognition. It seems to me that this is not only because Forster’s

²⁰ Jacobs 19. For the “photographic” aspect of modernism’s visual imagination, see Jacobs 18-27.

²¹ Graham Smith, ‘Light that Dances in the Mind’: Photographs and Memory in the Writings of E. M. Forster and His Contemporaries, Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship between the Arts 2 (Oxford: Lang, 2007). Rather than being a study on the anxiety about seeing, Smith’s volume is a positive account of how the popularization of photography stimulates the novelist’s imagination, and analyzes the literary practice of inserting the imaginary photos of art, architecture, and people in the fictions of Forster, Woolf, and other writers such as James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Christopher Isherwood.

essentially realist narrative is easier to put into films than other more “modernist,” experimental works, but also because in his writing there is something that really stimulates our optical imagination, and that “something” may be the author’s lively and pliable visual consciousness.

Forster has always been an elusive figure in the history of literary criticism. “The Elusive Forster” is the title of John Beer’s introduction to a collection of essays on his centenary, which shows that one hundred years after his birth, he is still a difficult writer to cope with.²² He is always counted as a member of Bloomsbury, but he was “on the periphery rather than at the heart of this circle.”²³ As we can see in Woolf’s famous commentary on him, even for his contemporaries, Forster appeared to be made up of many aspects that are not comfortably reconcilable:

... we have the sense that there is some perversity in Mr Forster’s endowment so that his gifts in their variety and number tend to trip each other up. If he were less scrupulous, less just, less sensitively aware of the different aspects of each case, he could, we feel, come down with greater force on one precise point. As it is, the strength of his blow is dissipated. He is like a light sleeper who is always being woken by something in the room. The poet is twitched away by the satirist; the comedian is tapped on the shoulder by the moralist; he never loses himself or forgets himself for long in sheer delight in the beauty or the interest of things as they are.²⁴

The latter half of this passage is frequently cited by Forster critics for its ingenious expression, but in my view, the former part is equally important since it captures the strength of Forster’s works, though for Woolf it

²² John Beer, introduction, *E. M. Forster: A Human Exploration, Centenary Essays*, eds. John Beer and G. K. Das (NY: NY UP, 1979) 1-10.

²³ David Medalie cites this phrase of David Garnett, who knew Forster in person as a member of the group. See Bradshaw 36.

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, “The Novels of E. M. Forster,” *Collected Essays*, Vol.1 (London: Hogarth, 1967) 342-51 at 348-49.

appears as his weakness. If one sees the other side of the phrase, “[i]f he were less scrupulous, less just, less sensitively aware of the different aspects of every case,” it can mean that Forster is too sensitive and honest to dismiss the complicated, contradictory aspects of things. Beer makes a similar point about this passage and says that it tells us that Forster was trying to remain true to a variety of urges, consideration and roles, each of which works in him equally strongly; he tried to remain true both to the past and to the changes happening around him and was in consequence left with a fragmented vision, not a unified one.²⁵ Arguably, however, in Forster’s elusiveness we can always find some radiance—his remarkably sincere, faithful reaction to the quickly changing world at the dawn of the twentieth century. He barely masks his winces or his disgust, but at the same time never stops searching for the possibility of a more positive response, and the amalgamation of these attitudes is what we encounter in his texts.

In recent years, there has been a critical trend to dwell on these features and mixture of attitudes in Forster and to identify him as an inchoate modernist. This current was started by David Medalie’s E. M. Forster’s Modernism (2002), in which he examines Forster’s “reluctant modernism,” mainly from three perspectives.²⁶ Rather than simply identifying him as an iconic figure of liberal humanism, Medalie argues that Forster’s works reflect the dynamic tension between the old,

²⁵ Beer and Das, A Human Exploration 265.

²⁶ David Medalie, E. M. Forster’s Modernism (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002). The phrase, “reluctant modernism,” appears on the very first page.

individualistic liberalism of the Victorian age and the Edwardian, more society-oriented “new liberalism.”²⁷ To describe Forster’s relation to the realist tradition, Medalie coins the word “romantic realism”—an Edwardian fictional hybrid that narrowly secures room for individual freedom within the constraints of society—and then sees some modernist factors intervening in his belief so that this type of realism falters as Forster’s career develops.²⁸ Lastly, Medalie goes on to discuss Forster as an “ambivalent formalist” through a close examination of the eclecticism of Aspects of the Novel (1927) and reads A Passage to India (1924) as a putting into practice of what he theorizes there.²⁹ Forster distances himself from contemporary formalist literary theories such as Percy Lubbock’s which despite its formalism is, in many ways, a remnant of the 1890s High Aestheticism, and also of the aesthetics of Fry and Bell. Alternatively, his interests point toward the use of “rhythm” in fiction, a loosely symbolic solution to the aesthetic absolutism he appears to find in these theories. With these attempts, Medalie eventually aims to present a broader view of modernism itself, less decisive than usually assumed about its own novelty, but more elegiac and perplexed in the face of a rapidly changing world.

The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster, published in 2007, basically follows Medalie’s line of argument in the sense that it tries to

²⁷ Medalie 1-62.

²⁸ Medalie 63-97.

²⁹ Medalie 98-158. See also Nicholas Royle, E. M. Forster, *Writer and Their Work* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1999), which focuses on the “modernist” nature of Aspects of the Novel and reads Forster’s novels by putting emphasis on their elusive, cryptic phrases.

illuminate the complexity and ambivalence in Forster's writing. In his short introduction, David Bradshaw urges us to see Forster "neither as icon nor stooge";³⁰ he also adds, however, that this should result not simply in admitting Forster's modernist aspects but also in recognizing the limit: "Just as he is more of a modernist, perhaps, than we have been inclined to acknowledge, he is less enlightened about race and class than he might seem on first acquaintance."³¹ Randall Stevenson's contribution to this volume, "Forster and Modernism," focuses specifically on the question of to what extent Forster is really modernist.³² Stevenson presents the view that he is "scarcely a modernist" on the ground that the writer's reaction to modernity is in essence a late version of the Romantic: to the end Forster adheres to the correspondence between man and the outer world, while other more "established" modernists such as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Woolf assume their broken connection between them as it is and turn toward the inner psyche of the human. In addition to his more detailed stylistic and thematic analysis of Forster's works, Stevenson makes a general point about the whole dispute about modernism: in questioning how far an author is a modernist, we unconsciously use the term "modernist," which is originally taxonomic, in an honorific way to scale his/her literary achievement. Stevenson says that an attempt such as Medalie's to expand the scope of modernism in order to include Forster risks the danger of obscuring the real significance of the novelist's relation

³⁰ Bradshaw, introduction 3.

³¹ Bradshaw, introduction 6.

³² Randall Stevenson, "Forster and Modernism," Bradshaw 209-22.

to modern conditions. Nonetheless, he manages to conclude his article with an affirmative tone:

Few authors demonstrate as clearly as Forster the reshaping of an inherently nineteenth-century imagination by the demands of the twentieth. Without much sharing the revolutionary initiative of modernism, his work thoroughly illuminates the expanding modern pressures which made it so necessary. This is reason enough to continue considering Forster alongside modernist writing, perhaps even to discuss 'E. M. Forster's Modernism,' providing its revealing limitations are fully and firmly recognised.³³

Forster is barely a modernist in this reading, but his writing is worth examining in relation to modernism since its limitations may reveal something about it—perhaps we can count this tentative, almost baffling assertion of Stevenson as one of the numerous attempts to give an outline to the evasive, in-between nature of Forster's fictional world.

It is exactly because of this widely-recognized feature of Forster that I take him up as a main figure in this dissertation. Caught between the two centuries, the old and the new, the realist tradition and the advent of modernism in literature, Forster's works may offer us one of the most appropriate bodies of material to see the moment when a new self-consciousness about the nature of seeing was actually reshaping itself. In looking at his works, it is also hoped that we might gain new insights into the more "revolutionary" aspects of modernism. For this reason, Virginia Woolf's works are also discussed in the following pages. Set alongside Forster's, her writing too may begin to radiate with new significance. Also, she seems to be more aware of the physiological nature

³³ Bradshaw 221.

of sight that is suppressed in the Cartesian optical model, and her self-conscious gesture to combat it eventually helps her to overcome what appears to Forster a “strain” that his realist camera could not withstand.

In the first chapter I am going to examine Forster’s first novel Where Angels Fear to Tread (1903) in relation to Henry James’s novels, especially The Ambassadors (1901), to see how the gap between sight and knowledge is explored in their fictional worlds. When Forster started his career as a writer, James was a dominant figure in modern literary circles, and Where Angels Fear to Tread shows a strong Jamesian influence in its choice of an aesthete male protagonist who is blind to the moral engagements of the people around him. Forster tries to keep some distance from James by not conferring his hero to the end the privileges of detached observation. He pushes Philip Herriton into the world of action, but this ironically crushes the ocularcentric moral equilibrium which James narrowly secures for his aesthetic (and potentially homosexual) protagonist. This chapter tries to illuminate how, by the early twentieth century, a general impression has been formed that what is visible to the eye is not necessarily connected to the truth about the world, and that Forster responded to this epistemological shift quite sensitively at the initial stage of his career.

Chapter two looks at Forster’s visual consciousness from a different angle—the tourist gaze. From the earliest stage, being a tourist has always been an important theme for his fiction. One can count a number of Forsterian characters who are discontented with their experience of

tourism and wish to “see” the reality of the place they visit. Taking up A Room with a View (1908) first, I will discuss this frustrated expectation of the tourist as one of the characteristically modern visual experiences: tourism turns the world into one large picture, a representation, and in consequence we are obliged to seek after its lost origin, its “real” face. The dissatisfaction that Lucy Honeychurch feels in Florence epitomizes this, and Forster links her liberation from the tourist gaze to her independent, matured assessment of the world and her sexual awakening. This chapter also includes the analysis of the film and TV versions of A Room with a View, and tries to show that the acute observation about the tourist gaze in Forster’s original is deprived of its essence in their postmodern, technology-oriented visual mastery.³⁴ The latter half of chapter two is devoted to Forster’s unfinished piece, Arctic Summer (1911), in order to examine the waning of touristic desire and the advent of an alternative mode of seeing, the formalist gaze, in his writing. The period when Forster was writing this novel overlaps with the beginning of his friendship with Roger Fry, and the novel reflects his desire to test out and reflect on Fry’s aesthetic, to see whether it can compensate for the vanishing possibility of romantic experience abroad (which the characters in Forster’s earlier Italian novels are so eager to recover).

In chapter three, we witness the ultimate fall of Western ocularcentrism in A Passage to India (1924). This time the heroine travels

³⁴ A Room with a View, dir. James Ivory, perf. Maggie Smith, Denholm Eliot, Helena Bonham Carter, and Daniel Day-Lewis. Curzon, 1986; A Room with a View, dir. Nicholas Renton. DVD. IWC, 2007.

as far as to the East, and her wish to see the “real” India runs against an epistemological impasse in the face of the Other. Referring to recent trauma studies, I argue that in leaving Adela’s experience in the Marabar Caves forever unknowable, Forster’s ingenious tactic is simply to present this cognitive dead end as faithfully as possible. Also, with the collapse of ocularcentrism, this last novel shows a more unrestrained use of modernist techniques. The realist narrative gives way to the use of multiple points of view, and simultaneously, it tries to conceptualize an abstract space from where it might be possible still to look upon the world objectively: such conceptualization is itself a characteristically modernist impulse. This chapter aims to locate A Passage to India at the extreme verge of the tradition of ocularcentric realism by showing that the novel exposes the furthest point that it can reach, as well as indicating the realm beyond.

The following two chapters are on Woolf and they look at her unique strategy of the visual—her feminist focus on the physicality of vision. Chapter four especially features the privileged moment called “the moment of being” in her writing, in which sight is not dominant, as in so many modernist epiphanies, but is always mixed up with other sense perceptions. How Woolf achieves this is first approached through discussion of the historical context that nurtured the aesthetics of the “naked” eye—the model of vision dissociated from the work of mind—of which Fry’s theory is regarded as one variation. I investigate Fry’s influence on Woolf and the way in which she gradually moves beyond its limitations, in order to foster her own visual aesthetic, not only by cutting off the Cartesian mind-eye

connection but also by exploring, in her verbal medium, the physical nature of vision as a conceptual blank in the ocularcentric tradition.

Based on the discussion in chapter four, the next chapter presents a close reading of To the Lighthouse (1927), in which the innovative nature of Woolf's visual scheme becomes fully evident with the presence of a female painter as its protagonist. In the first part of the novel, "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay is always arrested under the "male gaze" of the men staying at the Ramsays' summer house, and this seriously disturbs Lily Briscoe's attempt to try to capture in paint her true being. After the radical experiment of the "eyeless" narrative in "Time Passes," Woolf fully develops her new ontology of vision in the last part. My reading of "The Lighthouse" is guided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the visual, which tries to pin down the purely physical aspect of sight before what the eye sees is made into any objective thought in the mind. Focusing on the quick movements of Lily's body at the moment of creation and Mr. Ramsay's boat moving toward the lighthouse, I would like to argue that, in this final part, Woolf's feminist aesthetics achieves what Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorizes decades later in his philosophical writing.

The last chapter shifts the point of focus to a contemporary work, Zadie Smith's On Beauty (2005). Smith has unhesitatingly admitted Forster's strong influence on her works, and her third novel is an outspoken parody of Howards End. The novel basically follows the domestic plot of Howards End, but one of the major changes from Forster's original is the replacement of the country house in need of a spiritual heir,

with a painting. On Beauty sets out to revive aesthetic issues such as the nature of beauty, formerly marginalized in post-structuralist and ideological critiques. The aesthetic and philosophical problem of seeing and knowing that interested the novelists of the early twentieth century is once again placed at the forefront of the novel's preoccupations but in the context of the postmodern condition and its characteristic interests. Forster's main concerns in Howards End—the relationship between culture and capital, and also between one's aesthetic sensibility and its moral possibility—are explored by Smith in the contemporary American background. Of key significance is the racial issue in which seeing the surface, the color of skin, is given supreme importance. This chapter also offers some further analysis on the male gaze and the female body that is introduced in the chapters on Woolf. Looking back to the discussion in the previous chapters and looking forward to a new type of ocularcentrism that is likely to emerge, this final chapter aims to demonstrate our everlasting interest in the power of sight, though it accompanies different types of fictionalization and theorization according to the historical and cultural circumstance of each age.

Before closing this introduction, I should like to make a note on my use of visual terms in this dissertation. The basic principle is that I use most of them interchangeably so that the reader can follow the argument without semantic distraction concerning slightly different meanings that each of them might carry. I mean exactly the same action by the verb “see” and “look at”; both “sight” and “vision” simply refer to our normal visual

perception; the words such as “the visual” and “the ocular” are also alternatively employed to indicate broadly anything related to the work of the eye. The only exception is the use of “gaze.” In today’s criticism, the word “gaze” is almost always given some ideological implication. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s usage was intended to release the word from this burden,³⁵ but “gaze” still seems to carry it, especially when used in expressions such as the male gaze, the tourist gaze, and the white man’s gaze. My use of the word, therefore, also follows this general trend in criticism.

³⁵ As for Merleau-Ponty’s new ontology of the gaze, I will discuss this in detail in chapter five of this dissertation.

Chapter 1

“Lenses Procured from a Rather Too First-class Oculist”?:

The Jamesian Aesthete Observer in Where Angels Fear to Tread

It is sometimes said that E. M. Forster’s first novel Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) has much in common with Henry James’s The Ambassadors (1903) published two years earlier.¹ Both are concerned with the aesthete protagonists’ encounter with foreign cultures; they are fascinated by what their mother countries do not possess, then disillusion follows to modify their enthusiasm, and in the end they return to their own places with a newly acquired moral consciousness. Around this subject of cultural encounter, many further analogies whirl. In both novels, what sets the plot in motion is an attempt to “win back” a significant person from the morally polluted air abroad, and a male protagonist is dispatched by a female figure who emanates a dominant air of moral influence from afar; each novel has another female character who understands and helps the protagonist, but the two are not united in any erotic heterosexual sense; in both novels, there is a young man whose marked masculinity is adored by the protagonist, who is apparently lacking in such virility himself. These numerous points may make it rather difficult to dismiss the two novels as purely coincidentally similar works.

¹ This is suggested by the critics focusing on the moralistic aspects of Forster’s novels. See, for examples, Lionel Trilling, E. M. Forster: A Study (London: Hogarth, 1944) 51-52, and Frederick C. Crews, E. M. Forster: A Peril of Humanism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964) 80-81.

Henry James is an author towards whom Forster remained somewhat ambivalent: like many of his novelist contemporaries, he seems fascinated and enraptured, but at the same time puzzled and alarmed, by James's masterful technique. The name of James and his works appear again and again in his writing. Once Forster actually met James at Rye, and wrote to a friend about his tense yet exultant feeling on this occasion: "It is a funny sensation, going to see a really first class person. I felt all that the ordinary healthy man feels in the presence of a Lord."² No doubt in young Forster's eyes James looms as a great literary master, and some more biographical anecdotes support the inference that James's work might always linger in his mind at the early stage of his career.³ Nonetheless, it is also for James that in his later years Forster reserves his most sustained criticism. In Aspects of the Novel (1927), James is taken up as a representative of writers who sacrifice the character and other lively aspects of life to the aesthetic wholeness of the novel (AN 137-44). Here it is particularly The Ambassadors and its protagonist, who Forster thinks is typically Jamesian, that are extensively examined. Forster's diagnosis of Lambert Strether is as follows:

² Forster's letter to Edward Joseph Dent, written in February 1908. Lago and Furbank 92. Though Forster was, not altogether inappropriately, mistaken by James for G. E. Moore, he wrote that he enjoyed the visit very much. More details about the visit are found in P. N. Furbank, E. M. Forster: A Life, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 163-65.

³ See Nichola Beauman, E. M. Forster: A Biography (NY: Knopf, 1994). Beauman reveals that Forster secretly nicknamed an acquaintance he made in Florence as "Miss Stackpole" after Henrietta Stackpole in A Portrait of a Lady and says: "As Morgan grew into his persona of a novelist he incorporated James's influence into it, in his theme and occasionally his language" (98). Beauman also points out that there is a trace of James in a short story titled "Ralph and Tony," which Forster wrote during his trip in Italy: the plot avoids too heavy a Jamesian touch, but the character of Ralph has some similarities to that of Ralph Touchett (137).

He is the observer who tries to influence the action, and who through his failure to do so gains extra opportunities for observation. And the other characters are such as an observer like Strether is capable of observing—through lenses procured from a rather too first-class oculist. Everything is adjusted to his vision, yet he is not a quietist—no, that is the strength of the device; he takes us along with him, we move. (AN 138)

The power of observation is what Percy Lubbock highly values about Jamesian fiction in The Craft of Fiction (1921). Lubbock thinks that “the point of view” is an important factor through which the aesthetic wholeness of a novel is achieved, and, quite understandably, praises The Ambassadors for its fixed point of view: everything is described through Strether’s eye to the effect of dramatizing the movement of his consciousness. For Lubbock, James is the writer who uses all the possibilities of this method and makes an epoch in the technique of novel writing.⁴ In Aspects of the Novel Forster dismisses this idea of Lubbock, contending that it does not matter whether the author takes up only one point of view or shifts freely among several, as long as he has the power to “bounce” the reader into accepting what he says (AN 82-84).

On the one hand, the narrative point of view is a part of a familiar problem that has always divided men of letters and that, at the outset of the twentieth century, took the form of a dispute between two major authors, Henry James and H. G. Wells. While Wells claimed that the art of literature should register the reality of life for the further welfare of society, James refuted this by arguing that life should be subordinate to the

⁴ For Lubbock’s argument on The Ambassadors and its use of point of view, see Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: Cape, 1921) 156-71. Aspects of the Novel frequently ridicules this study of Lubbock, and seems to be suspicious of the contemporary literary criticism, which is clad in the air of a coherent, scientific method to analyze the art.

perfection of art, since that is the sole way to preserve human experience.⁵ Aspects of the Novel pays attention to this dispute, and Forster admits that he is much amused by Wells's caricature of Jamesian fiction in Boon and announces, "My prejudices are with Wells" (AN 144-45). Forster is certainly never so keen on creating an aesthetic synthesis as James is, being more concerned with the moral consequence of the character's behavior. However, neither do we find any particular defense of Wellsian general hostility towards technical innovation. As suggested by the distinction that Forster makes between people and other factors in fiction and also by his anti-historical metaphor of writers from all periods writing simultaneously in a circular room of the British Library, he too is not free from the inclination to separate the phases of actual life and those of art. Forster's origins in the upper-middle class and his high educational background situate him standing apart from his contemporaries such as Wells, George Gissing, and Arnold Bennett, who directly grapple with rising sociological problems. Therefore, Forster's attitude in Aspects of the Novel may rather be called an eclectic formalism: it is specifically Jamesian, excessive and constraining formalist techniques that he

⁵ For the entire correspondence between James and Wells, see Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, eds., Henry James and H. G. Wells: A Record of Their Friendship, Their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1979). This book has a chapter on James taken from Boon (234-60). There Wells criticizes James for his aiming too much at "pictorial unities" in novel writing. He sets his alter ego Boon the writer to say: "James has never discovered that a novel isn't a picture. . . . That life isn't a studio. . . ." (244). For Boon, James is superficial without the power of penetration since he accepts society and depicts it as it is. Although he does not use the exact term, Boon is also critical of James's use of the point of view for its effect of omitting the diverse aspects of life: "The picture . . . is forced to a unity because it can see only one aspect at a time. I am doubtful even about that. Think of Hogarth or Carpaccio. But if the novel is to follow life it must be various and discursive. Life is diversity and entertainment, not completeness and satisfaction. . . ." (246).

criticizes, not formalism *per se*.⁶ Perhaps a similar observation can be made of Forster's protest against Lambert Strether. The sly expression, "through lenses procured from a rather too first-class oculist," insinuates that it is not exactly his power of observation itself but its predominance and even interference that is problematic: everything is described only in the way that Strether is capable of seeing, and other aspects of the character's lives, which would have been known from different perspectives, are eliminated from the text.

Traditionally, the narrator of realist fiction is allowed to move freely from one point of view to another and report to the reader what "he" sees. This freedom is supported by the potential comparability between his words and the world—the belief that knowledge about human life is attained through the meticulous description of visible materials. In my understanding, the critical focus on point of view in the early twentieth century seems a sign of waning trust in this "omniscient" power of the realist narrator. When it is felt that the story can be related from any angle, there is no real necessity to talk about it as an hypothetical whole. The idea that things might only be seen from particular situated perspectives reflects an epistemological anxiety that one can never perceive the whole from any perspective except the "whole" constructed through any one perspectival seeing. This highlights a widening "crack" in the Cartesian

⁶ As for Forster's eclectic, ambivalent formalism in *Aspects of the Novel*, I have consulted Medalie 98-128 and S. P. Rosenbaum, "Aspects of the Novel and Literary History," *E. M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*, eds. Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 55-83.

equation of seeing and knowing.⁷ In this view, Forster's reduced interest in the marked use of point of view may be taken as evidence that he still maintains a relatively firm confidence in the realist method of writing. Nonetheless, in his first novel, Forster sets up a Strether-like aesthetic observer as a protagonist, who must undergo an educational period to become aware of his own moral responsibility. The progress of Philip Herriton is deeply complicit with that of his eye, and the whole story can be read as a text about how to fill up the gap between visual perception and moral knowledge, but by a different strategy from that of James. Whereas James ultimately places full confidence in the power of the visual impression to provide knowledge, Where Angels Fear to Tread shows much more ambiguity, being concerned with what Philip actually should and could "do." To put it in another way: Forster's first novel is an attempt to remove the Jamesian, too fine lenses from the protagonist's eye and to set him to moral action. By discussing Where Angels Fear to Tread alongside some of James's works, this chapter aims to examine how far Forster, as a young novelist, manages to keep his distance from James, as well as to look at the general uncertainty that the novelist of the age felt about the conventions of realism.

⁷ Norman Friedman traces the rise of the point of view as a major critical concept in "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," PMLA 70 (1955) 1160-84. According to Friedman, it is James himself who first used the term, the point of view, in the context known to us today, and critics such as Joseph Warren Beach and Lubbock undertook the theorization of it. Although Friedman's article is an informative resource about the critical history of the point of view, his exclusively formalistic analysis of the point of view may appear rather anachronistic to the eyes of the contemporary reader. Friedman concludes that a point of view is chosen by the author due to the desired effect; but, as I shall attempt in this chapter, such a change in aesthetic inclination can be subject to an analysis of more historical awareness.

1.1. Blindness or Innocence: Sight and Knowledge Disconnected

At first, we should grasp the nature of the problem about Philip's way of seeing things. As for his taste for art, we are told that at the age of twenty his sense of beauty caused him "to catch the art from Burne-Jones to Praxiteles" (WAF 70). In the light of Victorian aesthetic trends, it is telling that he likes these two artists in particular. As a mentor of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, John Ruskin praised early Italian paintings before Raphael as a prelapsarian state of art: in his eyes, they are often not as finished as the High Renaissance artworks in terms of skill, but are superior in their purer expression of faith.⁸ Though a late study on the Brotherhood reveals that the influence of Ruskin was, at least in their initial formation of theory, not as predominant as once assumed,⁹ they certainly shared both Ruskin's preference for the early Christian art over High Renaissance classicism as well as his idea that a work of art must be morally improving. Even their realism did not clash with Ruskin's desire for spirituality. He approved of it as a putting into practice of his phrase in

⁸ The religious content of the early Italian art apart from its aesthetic completeness was first advocated in Alexis-François Rio, *De la poésie chrétienne* (1836, appeared in English translation in 1854 as *The Poetry of Christian Art*). Rio's book triggered an important change in the evaluation of early Italian art in the Victorian age. See Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 97-101.

⁹ Marcia Werner, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 19-49. Scrutinizing Ruskin's ideas of beauty in the second volume of *Modern Painters* and the Pre-Raphaelite manifesto organ *The Germ*, Werner proves that their formative ideas were mostly free from Ruskin's influence. John Ruskin, "Of Truth and Theoretic Faculties," *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* Vol. 21. *Modern Painters* Vol. 2 (NY: Bryan, 1894). *The Germ: A Pre-Raphaelite Little Magazine*, ed. Robert Stahr Hosman (FL: Gables, 1970).

Modern Painters, “go to nature, rejecting nothing,”¹⁰ an appeal to forsake the rigid principle of the Academy and to be once again in touch with the world as God’s creation. In the second-half of the Victorian era, however, as a reaction against two decades of Pre-Raphaelite realism, interest in the classical values of the High Renaissance was revived.¹¹ Edward Burne-Jones, the last major artist in the Brotherhood, is representative of this tendency, growing out of the influence of Ruskin and, in his later career, showing more interest in Sandro Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo Da Vinci. Burne-Jones’s choice of mythological subjects, and the idealistic, sculptural forms and Michelangelesque qualities of his later works, reflect the broader trends of the classicism and aestheticism of the Victorian High Art of that period.¹² With Philip’s liking for the Greek sculptor Praxiteles, whose name became widely known with the discovery of Hermes with the Infant Dionysus at Olympia in 1877,¹³ his taste for art may be regarded as seeking a classical formal perfection rather than a moral content in the object.

The problem about Philip is that he has adopted this standard in seeing his real life: he looks at it as a spectacle whose beauty sometimes

¹⁰ In the preface to Pre-Raphaelitism, a pamphlet he wrote in defense of their art, Ruskin quotes this phrase of his own from the first volume of Modern Painters. See Eric Warner and Graham Hough, eds., Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism, 1840-1910, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 70.

¹¹ Fraser 129.

¹² As for the detail about this change in his works in relation to the trend of Victorian High Art, see Fraser 125-32. The study by Werner, which discusses the Pre-Raphaelite Realism in the wider contexts such as the realism on the continent and the empirical tradition of British philosophy, excludes Burne-Jones with William Morris from its scope of research. See Werner 2.

¹³ Mary Beard and John Henderson, Classical Art: From Greece to Rome, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 100-02.

strikes his aesthetic sensibility but which contains nothing that would actually affect himself in any existentially emotive sense. He has travelled to Italy several years earlier, and “there he absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescos, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars. He came back with the air of a prophet who would either remodel Sawston or reject it” (WAFT 70). He has seen and judged everything according to this high aesthetic standard of beauty. Nature, art, building, people have all merged into one beautiful entity, and he transfers this aesthetic desire onto his hometown, Sawston. But reality includes much that is irreconcilable with this palatable vision, and it was due to his failure in realizing this that he did not achieve anything in his attempt to improve Sawston. What he should do now is to face the reality and to learn that “human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails” (WAFT 71). Philip’s troublesome way of seeing is most typically shown when, under Mrs. Herriton’s strict order, he goes to Monteriano for the second time and calls on Gino’s house to bring back late Lilia’s baby. Philip steps in and finds Caroline, Gino, and the baby together. For Caroline, this visit is a revelation. She realizes that there is something in the world that cannot and should not be apprehended by the Sawstonian cold moral principles. She has been always thinking of “its welfares, its soul, its morals, its probable defects,” but the baby in reality “did not stand for a principle any longer. It was so much flesh and blood, so many inches and ounces of life . . .” (WAFT 117). She finds between Gino and his son an inviolable tie of blood and love, and gives up her original intention of

adopting the child. The bathing of the child on the terrace is, therefore, a secular ritual to confirm her recognition and decision. Philip is, however, completely blind to the meaning of the scene. With his revived sense of beauty from the previous night's opera, he sees in front of him "the Virgin and Child, with Donor" (WAF 126). For him the sight is a religious tableau whose moral content is hidden from his eyes. In other words, his aesthetic spirit is so elevated that he finds beauty in such an ordinary scene, but he savors it without acknowledging any real emotion involved. He then goes on to the negotiation with Gino, which ends in a failure and later drives his sister Harriet to steal the baby from the house. Philip's eye, always seeking formal beauty in both art and life thus arrests him in the state of moral blindness.

This identification of formalism with moral deterioration probably shows a trace of Victorian moralism in Forster, for it is at the core of Ruskin's criticism, too. Ruskin thinks that a conscious desire for formal completion in art always marks a starting point of degradation, and that perfect finish must not be sought for its own sake since it leads to the disregard of moral content. Any degree of unskilfulness should be condoned as long as it is the sole way for the artist to express—as always expected in Ruskin's writings—his religious belief. Ruskin values the Gothic period over the Renaissance for its dynamic expression of the craftsman's piety, and attacks his country for a pride in manufacturing technology which has encouraged the production of things perfect in form but meager in spirit.¹⁴

¹⁴ For Ruskin's typical distrust of formal perfection, see his "The Nature of Gothic," On

Although Forster apparently does not share Ruskin's puritanical piety and sometimes ridicules his moral seriousness (Leonard Bast's use of passages from The Stones of Venice for describing his odious flat in Howards End may be the most unforgettable example),¹⁵ he never entirely detaches himself from Ruskinian moral consciousness. Forster certainly shares Ruskin's deep antipathy toward materialism and his sense of guilt about immersion in the Paterian pleasure of aesthetic experience. His parody of Ruskin should be understood not as the rejection of Ruskin's thoughts themselves but rather the show of regret about their being of little effect in the face of real social problems.

In Where Angels Fear to Tread, Forster teases Ruskin through the treatment of medieval frescos in Monteriano. The town's main church is given a star in Baedeker thanks to its frescos, which are allegedly the work of Giotto. Ruskin praises Giotto most highly, arguing that he fused the formality of Byzantine art and the Gothic imagination in an ideal way;¹⁶ he carried out a close examination of his frescos in the small town of Padua in Tuscany. Giotto "never finished highly"¹⁷ and his works are sometimes rather rough in quality, but "[a]ll his important existing works are exclusively devoted to the illustration of Christianity" and he is "the undisputed interpreter of religious truth, by means of painting, over the whole of Italy."¹⁸ As for the fictitious frescos in Monteriano, on the other

Art and Life (London: Penguin, 2004) especially 20 and 26.

¹⁵ For more about this passage, see my argument on Howards End in chapter six.

¹⁶ John Ruskin, "Giotto and His Works in Padua," The Works of John Ruskin, eds. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, Vol. 24 (London: Allen, 1903) 22-23.

¹⁷ Ruskin, "Giotto" 35.

¹⁸ Ruskin, "Giotto" 28.

hand, even their origin is doubtful: “for the inside Giotto was summoned to decorate the walls of the nave. Giotto came—that is to say, he did not come, German research having decisively proved . . . ” (WAFT 94). The theme of the frescos is the life of Santa Deodata, who lived and died in the medieval Monteriano, and her holiness is emphasized with typical Forsterian banter:

So holy was she that all her life she lay upon her back in the house of her mother, refusing to eat, refusing to play, refusing to work. The devil, envious of such sanctity, tempted her in various ways. He dangled grapes above her, he showed her fascinating toys, he pushed soft pillows beneath her aching head. When all proved vain he tripped up the mother and flung her downstairs before her very eyes. But so holy was the saint that she never picked her mother up, but lay upon her back through all, and thus assured her throne in Paradise. She was only fifteen when she died, which shows how much is within the reach of any schoolgirl. (WAFT 94)

Though the artist’s religious zeal, which might impress Ruskin, has no impact on this viewer, what Forster is doing here has basically the same structure as Ruskin’s criticism in that the beauty of surfaces is seen through and the moral nature of the artwork is foregrounded. Here the life of the saint is no longer assessed in the eyes of God; but now, viewed in the light of common sense: her stillness, even as her mother’s crisis unfolds, is criticized, albeit with some comic effect. Significantly, it is in front of this fresco that the most severe attack against Philip is conducted. Caroline, who has already undergone her own moral awakening at Gino’s house, has a long talk with Philip in the church. She says that Philip understands the whole situation wonderfully, but he does not try to “do” what seems right at present: “You told me once that we shall be judged by our intentions, not by our accomplishments. I thought it a grand remark. But we must intend to accomplish—not sit intending on a chair” (WAFT 134). This conversation

takes place under one particular fresco, that of the death of Santa Deodata. Philip's moral inertness is paralleled to the saint, who achieved glory by doing nothing but just watching what happened around her. Finally Caroline indicts Philip for all the time being "dead—dead—dead" (WAF 134).

It is in the scene of the baby's death that Philip's lack of practical conscience finds a climactic expression in the form of literal blindness. Philip and Harriet are leaving Monteriano with the baby stolen from Gino's house by the furious Harriet. But Philip, being still insensitive to the bond of affection between the Italian father and son, wrongly guesses that Gino has given up the child, perhaps for money, and this thought depresses him. As their carriage runs through complete darkness, Philip thinks that the baby is crying and wants to see him; but repeatedly the match flickers and goes out, leaving him blindly groping in darkness. At last, "for a full quarter-minute they contemplated the face that trembled in the light of the trembling flame" (WAF 144), but the next moment the carriage overturns and the baby is killed. The text seems intentionally to omit the precise description of the baby's countenance in order to reveal Philip's inability to see the real, heartfelt emotion between people. The baby might be symbolically weeping over his forced separation from his father, and his face, which must have been visible in "a full quarter-minute," was beyond his ken. The loss of the baby's life arrives as an undeniable fact concerning life and death and finally opens his eyes to his responsibility: "It was his own fault, due to acknowledged weakness in his own character" (WAF

146). For the first time in his life, then, Philip undertakes a moral action of his own, that is, to go back and tell the news to Gino himself. With this he moves one step nearer his spiritual salvation.

James's The Ambassadors is, on the other hand, also a novel which problematizes the gap between visual impression and moral knowledge: Strether is described as a man whose visual sensitivity keeps him in a state of moral naïveté. Just as Philip's sense of beauty is revived in Italy, having left his puritanical hometown Woollett, Strether is almost mesmerized by the beauty of Paris. In his eyes, Chad, who is allegedly "caught" by a siren and should be shipped back to America by force, appears to have greatly improved in this beautiful city full of attractive people. Madame de Vionnet also charms Strether with her fairness and refined wit, and so he believes the words of Little Bilham, that theirs is "a virtuous attachment" (A 1:180). Paris serves Strether as a frame to transform everything into the scene of a splendid artwork, and this effect culminates in the so-called "Lambinet" episode. After the disappearance of the second ambassadors dispatched by Mrs. Newsome, the much-relieved Strether takes a fancy to the idea of putting his aesthetic dream into practice. He remembers "a certain small Lambinet" that had charmed him years ago, and goes on a day-trip to a rural suburban village in order to find "that French ruralism, with its cool special green, into which he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window of the picture-frame" (A 2:245). The trip is an attempt to thrust himself into the painting, and accordingly, the vision of "the oblong frame" is constantly present to his

mind's eye. Getting off the train, he finds himself stepping into the world of art: "The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines . . . it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet" (A 2:247). For the whole day, he imagines himself moving around in a Lambinet, and toward the evening, when he reaches a village, "[h]e really continued in the picture . . . [he] had meanwhile not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame" (A 2:251-52). Most ironically, it is at this place of ideal rural beauty that Strether fatally comes across the pair of Chad and Madame de Vionnet. The scene on the river "crystallizes James's distinction between impressions and knowledge"¹⁹—although he has been going through numerous impressions, until now he has not understand what they actually *mean*: "He recognized at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing. Verily, verily, his labour had been lost" (A 2:266). But after this recognition of their adulterous liaison, Paris ceases to serve as an art frame, and Strether makes up his mind to go back to America.

Despite this distinction between impression and knowledge, however, in The Ambassadors the novel's motif of visual impressions as educative is not seriously undermined.²⁰ After all, the truth is first brought about by the visual, not by the verbal. Strether has been callous towards whatever other people (even Madame herself) insinuate, and all the verbal information is finally unified by *the sight* on the river which indicates truth. We find a very similar occasion in another Jamesian work, The

¹⁹ Marianna Torgovnick, The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 180.

²⁰ Torgovnick 177.

Portrait of a Lady (1881). Again, it is from *a sight* that Isabel first suspects that there might be something wrong between Osmond and Madame Merle:

Just beyond the threshold of the drawing-room she stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. . . . What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. . . . There was nothing to shock in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. But it was all over by the time she had fairly seen it. (PL 2:164-65)

Although their past relation is actually revealed to Isabel by Countess Gemini much later, this image has lingered in Isabel's mind long since, and when the truth is put into words, the reader realizes that the scene above is already ingrained with it. In this way, the gap between visual information and its real meaning is explored in James's texts, but in the end it is eliminated through retrospective force. The extensive analogy of the novelist and the painter in "The Art of Fiction" illustrates that James never seriously puts into question the idea that describing the surface of things, if done by a skilful artist, ultimately reaches the profound truth about human life.²¹ In this essay he emphasizes that the novelist's mission is to produce the air of reality as it is for the painter, and he shows no hesitation in announcing that "the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete."²² Whether one is a novelist or a painter, James thinks, there should be the

²¹ Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers and English Writers, Library of America (NY: Literary Classics of US, 1984) 44-65. Karen Jacobs analyses this belief of James in terms of the concept of the "interior gaze," which she identifies as a modernist invention to assure the availability of visual truth and of which James is the originator. See Jacobs 18-27 and 47-71.

²² James, "The Art of Fiction" 46.

same striving to express individual experience, a personal impression of life and through the medium to create an illusion of life: "It is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the color, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of human spectacle."²³ From this passage it is obvious that what he calls "impression" consists exclusively of the visual: if the artist chooses the proper "look of things," it naturally conveys meaning. When a Jamesian character receives wrong impressions or does not understand the meaning of what he sees, it simply implies that there is something further to be learnt by him/her. The gap between sight and knowledge is always used by James to give shape to the growth of a character's mind. Strether and Isabel have to recognize that the enchantment of Europe has a dark side of moral corruption, and their blindness is not censured as moral paralysis as in the case of Forster's Philip. On the contrary, it is the revelation of their *innocence*, the purity of their mind; to see this as blindness or ignorance has the effect of disclosing the moral corruption on the reader's part. James places full confidence in visual representation as the vehicle, finally, for truth. This explains one of the most remarkable characteristics of the Jamesian fictional world: in this world, knowledge, not its practical consequence, is sought after as a supreme end. Strether's ambassadorial mission is a success, since Chad is likely to go back before long. But this does not have much impact on

²³ James, "The Art of Fiction" 51.

Strether, and what really matters is that now he is a more mature person than he was. What he will *do* is merely implied by what *he would not do*: he is not staying in Paris, but neither is he marrying Mrs. Newsome back home. Similarly, The Portrait of a Lady shows that knowledge is a goal in a more dramatic way by opening up the plot: we are not informed until the last scene that Isabel has left for Rome and so too we are kept in suspense about the fate of her relations with her indomitable suitor, Casper Goodwood.

If we now return to Where Angels Fear to Tread, we realize that it has adopted a quite different strategy in order to fill up the gap between sight and knowledge. Back in Monteriano, Philip is nearly killed by Gino, but Caroline intervenes and saves his life. It is at the sight of Caroline consoling Gino that Philip's moral numbness is cured and his education completed:

Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly become inadequate for the things they have shown to us. He was happy; he was assured that there was greatness in the world. There came to him an earnest desire to be good through the example of this good woman. He would try henceforward to be worthy of the things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved. (WAF 152)

Quoting this passage, S. P. Rosenbaum argues that this awakening of Philip is a "Platonic" conversion. Although religious language and imagery are used, this scene transfixes a fundamental shift in attitude without relying on any external authority. His growing love for people and truth eventually elevates him from his love for beauty to love of the good.²⁴ This salvation of Philip, originating in his aesthetic nature, functions also as a

²⁴ Rosenbaum, Edwardian Bloomsbury 84-85.

critique of the Sawstonian stiff moral doctrine. Sawston, a typical middle class suburbia and a stronghold of Victorian social respectability, is saturated with—to borrow Caroline’s expression—“petty unselfishness,” rather than “petty selfishness.” People spend their lives in making sacrifices for those they do not really care for, neglecting other things that would nourish their hearts (WAF 76). One of the problems about such Victorian philanthropic mindedness is the sharp and almost excessive polarity between egoism and altruism, which makes it fairly difficult to achieve a positive description of purely private forms of self-cultivation or self-assertion.²⁵ As Forster says against the evangelical Clapham Sect (with which he was connected by his mother’s benefactor Marianne Thornton), the Sawstonian society is presumably the one in which “[p]oetry, mystery, passion, ecstasy, music, don’t count”²⁶ since they are not visibly beneficial to others. In Where Angels Fear to Tread, salvation is available only to those who have maintained a pliancy of mind, which of course includes an ability to appreciate beautiful things, in spite of this atmosphere. While this possibility is denied to Mrs. Herriton and Harriet, who are utterly indifferent to the beauty of Italy, Philip and Caroline also achieve moral improvement through their lively response to it.

If Philip’s conversion can be called “Platonic,” it may be appropriate that he looks away at the crucial moment. It is Plato who first offered the distinction between two types of sight, a sensible sight and an intelligible

²⁵ Stefan Collini, Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 65-66.

²⁶ E. M. Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy, Abinger Ed. 11, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Arnold, 1972) 188.

sight, and what happens in this scene is that as Philip's sensible sight is exceeded by that of intelligibility, the "visible forms" of Caroline and Gino yield to a higher understanding that they have brought about. With this scene's ultimate "moralism," Rosenbaum concludes that the qualified formalism that Forster eventually espoused in later years is only implicit in his use of pictorial analogies to express feeling in Where Angels Fear to Tread.²⁷ Nonetheless, for me it seems to require extremely careful consideration to say that this is the moment when the "formalism" of his eye is finally cured, for what he encounters here is a sort of paradigmatic idea of the good grasped by not seeing what is present to the eye in a literal sense. Plato gives a privileged status to sight despite his general distrust in sense experience; but this is because of its ability to bridge the phenomenal world and the world of Idea, not for its power to see righteous ethical incentive in the physical world. It seems that what really happens to Philip in the crucial moment is a temporal withdrawal of his aesthetic formalism into a Platonic idealism.

If we look at the passage just before the conversion scene, it is clear that Philip's eye still perceives the scene as a painting:

All through the day Miss Abbott had seemed to Philip like a goddess, and more than ever did she seem so now. . . . Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips. (WAFT 151-52)

No particular religion is associated with Caroline's figure, but obviously

²⁷ Rosenbaum 85.

Philip bears in his mind the image of some religious painting. He transforms Caroline's humane sympathy with Gino into the infinite pity and majesty of some "goddess" that he has seen in "great pictures." Caroline's kissing Gino's forehead "seemed fitting"—fitting to the motif of Compassion.²⁸ Formalism is, as Rosenbaum says, "implicit" and may be swept away by the following conversion scene; nonetheless, it *is* there. At least in this part of the novel, it is not the content but the form that arouses strong feelings in Philip, and the subsequent moral awakening is attained when he "looks away" from this pictorial sight and sees with his intelligible eye that the "good" really exists. Plato's ethics are intertwined with his idea of knowledge: in order to be good, people must *see* the paradigmatic Idea of good, and the practical conduct is expected to follow naturally. This is also the case for Philip's conversion—since Caroline's deed has proved that the "good" really exists, he feels a strong desire to be a better person himself. All through this process, Caroline is seen as something other than herself: first as a goddess, and later as an almost anonymous "good woman."

In Where Angels Fear to Tread, the disconnection between sight and knowledge is in this way closed by using Philip's aesthetic taste as a sort of stepping-stone to an idealistic solution. Still, if we recall Caroline's words beside the Santa Deodata's fresco, to the end it is not very clear whether Philip's resolution is "just intending" or "intending to accomplish."

²⁸ Jane Goldman offers a very similar analysis on Philip's "aestheticising gaze" and the undecidability of the object of his gaze (is it Caroline or Gino?) in this scene. See Jane Goldman, "Forster and Women," Bradshaw 120-37 at 125.

Although Caroline's remark itself is to some extent obscured by omitting the verb's object (what should one "intend to accomplish"?), it may signify Forster's nascent struggle to stand apart from James, and perhaps also from Moore's ethics, which is generally regarded as the backbone of Bloomsbury's ethics and aesthetics. In spite of his "Refutation of Idealism," which was published in the same year and aims to break off from the Idealist tradition, his Principia Ethica (1903) is a distant descendant of Plato in that it locates the concept of good in a transcendental realm and sets the knowledge of it, not moral action, as a goal.²⁹ Moore dismisses the attempt to define "good" in any perceptible form (this includes psychological states) as a "naturalistic fallacy," and questions what kind of objects can have "intrinsic value" in absolute isolation from anything else in the world. Although what he singles out under this test—personal relationships and the beautiful—are certainly those Forster too values most, the distance between Moore's principle and his novels, which never cease to take the "outer" world of action into consideration, should not be overlooked. Medalie rightly points out this as follows:

Moore's criterion for assessing intrinsic value is that things must be good even when they exist 'in absolute isolation' . . . Forster's concern with 'connection' includes the implication that nothing exists 'in absolute isolation'. His work (like Virginia Woolf's) problematises what Moore offers as desirable in absolute terms; what is more, it presents as a quandary the relationship between right conduct and aesthetic value which Moore proposes as a necessary harmony.³⁰

²⁹ Moore declares that "[t]he direct object of Ethics is knowledge and not practice." G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Mineola: Dover, 2004) 20. Wilfred Stone locates the Cambridge Apostles in the tradition of philosophical idealism and English romanticism, and sees the revolutionary aspect of their ethics in their internalization of morality: they put emphasis on the inner condition of the individual, being indifferent to action and achievement. Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966) 51.

³⁰ Medalie 112.

As one finds a fuller expression in the epigraph of Howards End, “Only connect . . . ,” and Margaret Schlegel’s “sermon” in the same spirit,³¹ in Forster’s universe, nothing can stand quite independently from other aspects of life. Forster is always concerned with the contradictory elements such as thoughts and action, the ideal and the mundane, and the soul and the body, and strives to find a connection between them in a least conflicting way possible. His first novel already shows the germ of this inclination by taking into consideration not only knowing the good but also doing it and thus putting into question Moore’s modern version of Platonic ethics.

Ironically, however, this attempt of connection comes to bother the novel’s ending. Harriet’s rapid recovery from remorse and illness after the carriage incident—she quickly erases the memory of her own crime and starts referring to the whole event as “this unlucky accident” and “the mysterious frustration of one’s attempts to make things better” (WAF 156)—shows the astonishing power of self-justification with which a Sawstonian mentality is equipped. Facing this uncanny reality, it appears not so likely that the converted Philip will this time succeed in reforming Sawston. Caroline is determined to go back to her daily duties, and Philip’s love for her begins to crumple almost as soon as he recognizes it: he is told that she has been in love with Gino. Surely Philip is now a better man with

³¹ “Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and the both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die” (HE 188).

his knowledge of the good, but whether, hereafter, he can achieve something good in reality, is another matter: "Life was greater than he had supposed, but it was even less complete. He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. And now he saw what a very little way those things would go" (WAF 155). In the last few pages, we are repeatedly told that all the wonderful things are over. This creates a certain atmosphere of exhaustion, and, in the last scene, Philip is presented as retreating into his former aesthetic view of life. Philip takes Caroline's love for Gino as additional evidence of the world's greatness since now he sees behind Caroline's behavior, not only her good will to save Philip, but also her self-sacrifice in confronting her beloved man shortly after she had determined never to see him again. This revelation leads Philip into a not only aesthetic but also profoundly solitary contemplation: "Nobody but himself would ever see round it now. And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance" (WAF 160). He sees in her—this time the text specifies the source of his imagination—the vision of the beautiful goddess in the myth of Endymion (WAF 160). Moreover, he is geographically suspended on the train going back from Italy to England. He is practically nowhere, and there is no way to know if his experience in Italy will help him back in his own country. In this last scene, Philip is both psychologically and practically kept in isolation in order to maintain the value of his just attained moral superiority.

In this way, the ending of Where Angels Fear to Tread leaves some uncertainties behind, and one of the reasons hitherto unmentioned is that

although Philip, after all, falls in love with Caroline, the process is presented abruptly and is not altogether persuasive. Even in love, Philip admires her as an idealistic, spiritual being rather than a real, physical presence. This comes into view when Caroline protests against Philip's idealization of her, saying that she is "crudely" in love with Gino—she might have given him both her body and soul if he had asked (WAF 160). But these words merely make Philip idealize her more. This difficulty in describing heterosexual love seems to give another twist to Forster's attempt to outgrow James's influence and aesthetics. The following section will examine how this issue further complicates the problem of sight and knowledge in James and Forster.

1.2. The Vision Concealing and Revealing: Man at the Margin and Woman as the Work of Art

With his aesthetic view of life and underdeveloped moral consciousness, Philip might seem to inherit more from another character in James's fiction: Ralph Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady (1880).³² Ralph, like Philip, is a curious mixture of intellectual superiority and physical weakness: "Tall, lean, loosely and feebly put together, he had an ugly, sickly, witty, charming face, furnished, but by no means decorated, with a

³² The Portrait of the Lady was first published in 1880, but later extensively revised and republished in 1908. Forster seems to have been much interested in this novel and read it at least twice: once in 1899 when he significantly wrote "It is very wonderful but there's something wrong with him or me: he is not as George Meredith" (Selected Letters 31). He read it again in 1950 and was this time "greatly pleased" (Two Cheers for Democracy 364).

straggling moustache and whisker—he looked clever and ill—a combination by no means felicitous” (PL 1:5).³³ Ralph too poses as a detached outsider and is accused by Isabel of “an odious want of seriousness, of laughing at all things, beginning with himself” (PL 1:82). But unlike Philip, Ralph has an ostensibly justifiable reason for his inactivity: he is at the advanced stage of a pneumonic disorder. Because of this, he has been shut out from a career and spends his days at leisure without the prospect of full recovery. However, what affects Ralph might not only be his adverse health. As his father—a guardian of the social norm in this novel—assures him, he could marry Isabel if he really wishes. His problem is rather that he finds no strong desire to marry but prefers to “observe” his cousin’s life as a spectator.³⁴ Ralph is of the character and physical type that was regarded as constitutive of the male homosexual in the years surrounding the story,³⁵ and one may wonder if his disease is not serving as a convenient excuse for his bachelorhood. It is even probable that his incurable illness is a metaphor for his unfitness for matrimony (as the hereditary lame leg of Rickie Eliot functions in Forster’s The Longest Journey),³⁶ although Ralph’s possible homosexual tendency is never

³³ Note that this description is almost identical with that of Philip: “He was a tall, weakly-built young man, whose clothes had to be judiciously padded on the shoulder in order to make him pass muster. His face is plain rather than not, and there was a curious mixture in it of good and bad. He had a fine forehead and a good large nose, and both observation and sympathy were in his eyes. But below the nose and eyes all was confusion, and those people who believe that destiny resides in the mouth and chin shook their heads when they looked at him” (WAF 70).

³⁴ Kelley Cannon, Henry James and Masculinity: The Man at the Margins (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994) 12-13.

³⁵ Robert K. Martin, “Failed Heterosexuality in The Portrait of a Lady,” Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire, ed. John R. Bradley (NY: St. Martin’s P, 1999) 87-92 at 88.

³⁶ Leland S. Person, Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003) 89-92.

exposed in his actual relation with men and only implied in the vicarious pleasure he finds in the identification with both Isabel and her suitors.³⁷

Ralph's lack of passion, or rather his voyeuristic passion, toward Isabel takes a particular form of imagining her as a work of art. This tendency, which is shared by Forster's Philip as we saw above, is augured at Ralph's first tête-à-tête with his cousin. On the day of her arrival they loiter in the picture gallery at Gardencourt, and Ralph attentively gazes at her while she is looking at the pictures of his own choosing: "He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances, for she was better worth looking at than most works of art" (PL 1:61). Already in this scene, there are two different impulses colliding in Ralph's view of Isabel: while he places her originality and charm high above any work of art, he both physically and figuratively sees her on the same plane as art objects. Eventually, it is the latter impulse that triumphs over the former. Within one week he has quite made up his mind to the idea that he is not in love with her but that she is a quite interesting figure to "look at":

If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious she was an entertainment of a higher order. "A character like that," he said to himself—"a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art—than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral. . . . I had never expected less that anything pleasant would happen. Suddenly I receive a Titian, by post, to hang my wall—a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney-piece. The key of a beautiful edifice is thrust into my hand, and I'm told to walk in and admire . . ." (PL 1:86)

First he says to himself that Isabel is finer than any artwork, but his thoughts are soon sliding into the swamp of aesthetic metaphors. He

³⁷ Rickie's love for his cousin Agnes is also marked with this vicarious pleasure. He admires Agnes in the passionate, tragic love with her masculine fiancé Gerald, and therefore when he himself actually becomes her husband, their relationship turns out to be a failure.

compares her with a relief painting or building, and juxtaposes the pleasure of having her beside him to that of suddenly acquiring an excellent piece of art. Isabel is an “entertainment,” “a beautiful edifice,” for him to *look at*. This process may be “a cognitive necessity” for Ralph: even for a person of pliable intellect such as he is, it is impossible to leave a phenomenon like Isabel undefined.³⁸ But it should also be noticed that admiring her as a beautiful object of the gaze exempts Ralph from being sexually involved with her. When he enquires of Isabel why she refused Lord Warburton, Ralph insists that he has a right to know: “What’s the use of being ill and disabled and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life if I really can’t see the show when I’ve paid so much for my ticket?” (PL 1:209-10) Presently, then, he literally pays for the ticket to see Isabel’s show by asking his father to give her a considerable sum from his own portion of inheritance “to put a little wind in her sails” (PL 1:260). Mr. Touchett is going to leave enough money for two as he wants his son to marry her and “lead a natural life” (PL 1:259), but Ralph insists that Isabel should have half of the money without becoming his wife. His attitude to her is as if he were investing in a picture of a beautiful vessel voyaging out so that he can enjoy it ever after in his mental gallery. For his father, his excusing himself from the matrimonial union with Isabel seems to be

³⁸ Jonathan Freedman, Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990) 154. Freedman reads the novel as “a historically specific response to aestheticism” (146), in which Osmond embodies the satirical portrait of the aesthete in the mass media of 1880s. It describes the process of Osmondian aestheticism’s propagating among characters, but in the end Isabel achieves a higher sort of aestheticism, the intense vision of human sorrow and sympathy, and finally escapes the novel’s enterprise of drawing a portraiture of her. Freedman suggests that James thus draws a line between Osmond’s cruel aestheticism and his own.

“immoral” (PL 1:264). When the dying Mr. Touchett utters this word, it foresees Isabel’s future indirectly sacrificed by Ralph’s eccentric desire. Ralph is not exactly “immoral” since he certainly wishes good for her, but his spectatorship, his detachment from moral engagement, should be labeled as *amoral*.

In this way, both Philip and Ralph are marked by the similarities in which their gaze functions in picturing the female figure as if she is an artwork. This type of gaze seems to be an anomaly in the tradition of elevating sight as a privileged sense in literature. The realist novel trusts sight as a central faculty of human perception and employs it as a metaphor for knowing. In this context, the truth that is ultimately disclosed most of the time takes the form of a desired female body as the lost origin of life and language, and the protagonist’s approach to this body is what usually engenders the narrative.³⁹ As Laura Mulvey points out in her famous essay, the gaze is essentially a site of male dominance. Mulvey sees a central paradox of patriarchal society in its constant need of the visual image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to the phallogocentric vision of the world.⁴⁰ At the moment she is looked at, woman falls under its control and becomes a “bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.”⁴¹ Mulvey’s discussion focuses on early Hollywood films, but it also has ample validity when we examine the work of the gaze in literature.

³⁹ Peter Brooks, The Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993).

⁴⁰ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Screen 16:3 (1975) 6-18.

⁴¹ Mulvey 7.

The Romantic poets extensively exploited the idea of woman as a bearer of meaning: they represented their newly-discovered Nature as female functioning as the absolute Other and therefore a perennial source of the fountain of language and new meaning. However, with the recognition that its static rigidity could not register the dynamic motion of emotion and history, the idealistic, pictorial representation of women had acquired negative implications by the time that Victorian realism reached its apogee. In the Victorian novel, “the picturesque” is associated with the unrealistic, faulty vision of the world. The male character who looks upon the world as picturesque is accused of practical blindness, while the female who imagines or presents herself as a picturesque figure is marked with vanity and egoistical social ambition.⁴² Faulty as it seems, the gaze in this era still implies heterosexual interest even when it appears similar to the aesthetic vision of characters such as Ralph and Philip. The problem about these two characters is that, for them, the act of seeing has an opposite effect to the idea of the gaze as essentially male. Far from strengthening the phallogentric vision of the world, their aesthetic gaze rather subdues it by erasing the meaning that the object would have in this phallogentric order. Framed in this type of gaze, a woman is deprived of her physicality, and only then might she offer the male spectator a refuge from the expectation of hetero-normative behavior.

The difference between this “desexualizing” gaze and the traditional pictorial representation of women will become clearer if we look at some

⁴² Alison Byerly, Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

scenes in an archetypal work of realism—for example, George Eliot’s Middlemarch (1871-72).⁴³ When Ladislaw happens to see Dorothea in Rome, it is his friend Naumann, a German painter, who first takes notice of her. In the Vatican, Dorothea is standing beside the sculpture of Ariadne, and Naumann, struck with her picturesque beauty, invites Ladislaw to come and see her quickly “else she will have changed her pose.”⁴⁴ The first vision of her viewed by them is therefore quite static, and Naumann takes the fancy of drawing her portrait. But the next moment she moves forward, and Naumann blabs out his observation to Ladislaw: that she was with Casaubon just a while ago, and that she is married as he sees a wedding ring on her finger. Their conversation presently turns to her relation to Ladislaw, and the unimaginable jealousy that Ladislaw might feel toward his cousin. In this scene, in short, the aesthetic sight of Dorothea is not one to hinder the painter from seeing her as a sexual being. Also, Ladislaw is far from aestheticizing Dorothea. He protests against his friend’s wish to fix her beauty in a two-dimensional portrait, since it is impossible to express her charm fully in that medium: “As if a woman were a mere colored superficies! You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference in their very breathing: they change from moment to moment.”⁴⁵ Though indeed Ladislaw idealizes, almost idolizes, Dorothea, this attitude is not developed by him in order to excuse himself from the possibility of

⁴³ George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

⁴⁴ Eliot 177.

⁴⁵ Eliot 179.

erotic response or sexual association with her in its broad sense.⁴⁶

In this way, the aesthete's desexualizing gaze in Forster and James and the traditional pictorial representation of woman achieve quite different effects, but they have one thing in common: they are both highly conscious of their own deficiency. This expresses itself in the tendency to sever a woman from her surroundings and to put her into an aesthetic framework which implies a moral blindness potentially leading to a tragedy. We find one extreme example of this in The Portrait of a Lady in the malignant figure of Gilbert Osmond, who manipulates all women around him as if they are art objects. Osmond's sadistic treatment of women can be interpreted as a psychological need to relieve his sense of the indeterminacy of his social status.⁴⁷ As Madame Merle first introduces him to Isabel in their conversation, he has no distinct social privilege at all: "No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (PL 1:281). Isabel mistakes this for a token of his noble soul and marries him, but gradually is forced to see that he is anything but indifferent to keeping up appearances and his marrying her is merely to

⁴⁶ The pictorial representation of Dorothea should rather be comprehended as the reflection of her own determined self-renunciation, a kind of martyrdom, in the service of her husband, who turns out not to be a worthy recipient of such self-sacrifice. She believed that Casaubon may be a man of great intellect who would nourish her soul, but instead, he is simply a failed scholar in desperate (but repressed) need of female sympathy and consolation. While all other male characters try to impose some kind of morally idealized or aestheticised meaning on her, Ladislav alone appears to stand out against the temptation (this may explain why we have the impression that his passionate love for Dorothea is rather abstract). Moreover, this coincides with the fact that by now he has lost his old hope of becoming a painter. Dorothea also confesses that she is ignorant of how to enjoy the pictorial art; there are so few of them in which she can really rejoice. Their mutual relative indifference to visual art is congruent with the possibility of their forming a new type of relationship which can hardly be narrated in the patriarchal context (and is therefore nearly indescribable in the novel).

⁴⁷ Lynn S. Chancer analyses the sadomasochistic dynamic as a means to guarantee the illusion of whole self through controlling the other. Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992).

gratify his vanity. The narrator tells us that Osmond imagines Isabel as “a quick, fanciful mind which saved one repetitions and reflected one’s thought on a polished, elegant surface . . . His egotism had never taken the crude form of desiring a dull wife; this lady’s intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one” (PL 2:79). Earlier he chose Madame Merle for this task as her intellect seemed tremendous, but when she becomes too tame and too good to satisfy him, he dismisses her as if throwing away a flawed object of art: at their final interview, he detects an infinitesimal crack in her precious coffee-cup. Now her evacuated soul has no more value for him than the cup—a piece of earthenware. Perhaps that Osmond demands a wife like a silver plate with a shiny surface might be subjected to a Lacanian explanation: when one’s pride is not sufficiently maintained in the Symbolic, he is inclined to regress to the Mirror Stage, where an infant sees the imago of the whole self in his figure in the mirror.

Therefore the novel describes Osmond’s relationship with Isabel exclusively on the plane of the visual. Except that we are retrospectively told that Isabel had given birth to a male child who died after six months, there is no signpost of the couple’s physical intimacy; not a single kiss or touch is described, and the baby’s death may insinuate their sterile sexual affiliation. After a while Isabel realizes that her marriage is a failure, and thinks that “he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance” (PL 2:194-95). When Isabel stops sacrificing herself to become a “mirror” of his mind, then, Osmond flatly declines to look at her: “He had a way of looking at her through half-closed eyelids, as if he were

thinking of her but scarcely saw her, which seemed to her to have a wonderfully cruel intention” (PL 2:263). Although there is no outspoken sign of homosexuality in Osmond, he too carries a misogynistic nature and this serves as a reason for his immoral treatment of women. Having been surrounded by women all his life, he is deeply dependent on the female but at the same time resentful of the situation. He grew up as a fatherless child and “[o]ne could see this in Gilbert Osmond . . . see that he had been brought up by a woman” (PL 1:404). There may be a suggestion that his mother left her husband voluntarily, which may have made his distrust in women inveterate.⁴⁸ To Isabel’s infinite surprise and disgust, Osmond believes that almost all women are unfaithful to their husbands and that is the reason for his unusually suspicious nature. In short, we find one variation of the desexualizing gaze in Osmond: he is unable to form anything other than a sadomasochistic connection with the female, and his cruel eyes, transforming women into objects of the gaze may be one way of avoiding the direct confrontation with what he thinks of as their excessive sexuality. The desexualizing gaze, in this way, does not merely induce moral blindness, but can sometimes cause positive evil.

In The Ambassadors, however, James reshapes the figure of solipsistic aesthetes like Ralph and Osmond, and gives to Strether a more positive and balanced role. While in the earlier works such as Roderick Hudson (1875) such a character is likely to be crushed between the

⁴⁸ It is possible to detect a euphemism in the words telling the whereabouts of Osmond’s father: he is “lost in the grey American dawn of the situation, but reputed originally rich and wild, having died much earlier” (PL 1:404).

incompatible demands of an insistence on a life of vigorous activity and the aestheticist privileging of a life of pure contemplation, in The Ambassadors James amalgamates these two and invents a new aesthetic hero. Jonathan Freedman analyzes this process as follows:

Strether is committed neither to the aestheticist value of pure contemplative being nor to its antagonist, energetic doing; rather, he unifies these qualities into a complex amalgam of being and doing that realizes itself in acts of detached but sympathetic contemplation. In the world of The Ambassadors, merely to see is to act; moreover, in vision lies the only possible form of moral action in a world defined on the one hand by the crudities of Woollett, Massachusetts, and on the other by the corruption of Paris.⁴⁹

This sly equation of “being is seeing is doing” creates a sort of lacuna between two different sets of culture and morality. Strether realizes the inadequacy of Woollettish moral fastidiousness and secretly protests against it by not carrying out his mission to persuade Chad. But neither does he enjoy the voluptuous life of Paris, thinking that he is too old for that. He self-consciously confines himself to the role of a spectator and this eventually gives him a spiritual dignity which is not shared by any other person in the novel.

This lacuna also serves as an ideal retreat for Strether’s somewhat marginal sexuality. As Kaja Silverman argues, one of the possible readings of James’s fictions is that they are the reprise of the Freudian primal scene⁵⁰: for a Jamesian hero or heroine, it always arrives too early or too

⁴⁹ Freedman 141-42.

⁵⁰ Freud talks about the childhood witness of sexual intercourse between the parents in, for example, “On the Sexual Theories of Children,” The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, Vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1959) 209-26; for more extended analysis of an actual case, see “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” The Standard Edition, Vol. 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955) 48-60. For the general account of Freudian primal scene, see also Ned Luckacher, Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986).

late, and he or she does not develop into proper sexual maturity.⁵¹ Silverman also introduces a very useful theoretical model for thinking about the location of the subject in sexual fantasy: since we learn how to desire less from the visualization and imaginary appropriation of the other than through the articulation of a subjective locus, fantasy would seem to involve “the insertion of the subject into a particular syntax or tableau.”⁵² This is exactly what Strether wishes to do in the Lambinet episode we looked at earlier. All day he imagines himself moving in a tableau, and the sight of two lovers on the boat is “exactly the right thing . . . as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day” (A 2:256). It is nothing but appropriate, epitomizing the amorous life of the Parisian, except that they are Chad and Madame Vionnet. As if he is an infant who sees his parents’ love scene without the knowledge to understand it, it takes Strether a while to acknowledge their true relation. That night in the hotel, he feels ashamed of his ignorance: “he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll” (A 2:266). In this passage Strether is imagined as a child at a loss, but most strangely, he is compared to a *female* child. Freud says that it depends on which of the parents the infant identifies with in the primal scene fantasy how his/her later sexual development will work out. If he

⁵¹ Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (NY: Routledge, 1992) 157-84.

⁵² Silverman 6. In the introduction Silverman synthesizes the thoughts of various psychological thinkers from Sigmund Freud to Slavoj Žižek and brings forward the idea of “the fantasmatic,” which always comes from outside in the visual form and is used by the subject to make up the mirage of ego. See 1-7.

identifies with the father, he forms a positive and heterosexual Oedipal complex, whereas if he identifies with the mother, it leads to a negative and homosexual complex.⁵³ Strether imagined as a female child allows us to guess that he might have identified not with Chad but with Madame Vionnet. The text thus succeeds in leaving his sexuality undefined.

For Strether, the primal scene arrives too late to change the course of his sexual behavior. As he prophetically says to Little Bilham earlier, “now I’m old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh I *do* see, at least. . . . It’s too late” (A 1:217); and whatever he gains from the scene on the river, it is referred to only in the form of denial. Perhaps because of his financial debt to Mrs. Newsome (his occupation is an editor of The Woollett Review, “which Mrs. Newsome, for the most part, magnificently pays for” [A 1:64]), he is supposed to marry her after his mission in Paris. After all, however, he sets up his mind not to do so; but this does not mean either that he would marry Maria Gostrey, who has served him as a perfect “confidante” in Paris. Among James’s male characters Strether is probably the most successful in avoiding heterosexual entanglements in preference for bachelorhood. He avoids complicating his relationship with Maria by always talking about others, not about himself or the nature of their own relationship. As the story goes on, their conversation is gradually caught up in the rhetoric of heterosexual romance, but Strether never gives in and

⁵³ For the homosexual Oedipal complex, see Freud, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” and “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes,” Standard Edition, Vol. 19 (London: Hogarth, 1961) 250. See also Silverman 164-66.

stands aloof from it to the end.⁵⁴ At the same time, he never discloses any hostility at all towards heterosexuality. Although it is possible to read between the lines his latent homosexuality,⁵⁵ there never is any direct reference to it in the novel. This is the case for almost all other works by James with a few exceptions such as The Wings of a Dove (1902) and The Golden Bowl (1904), where sexuality is explicit. James is probably one of the least “sexual” of writers, but sexual interest is always felt behind the decorum and respectability of his works. Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analysis of “The Beast in the Jungle,” Haralson devotes the whole of his volume to the theme, “something” at the core could be suspected as homosexuality.⁵⁶ In the strictly homophobic air in Britain after the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895, only a character like Strether, whose justification for existence lies in spreading “a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken treads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue” to become “one of the people on whom nothing is lost,”⁵⁷ allows the author to write about a marginal man disengaged from heteronormative behaviors. In James, sexuality is simultaneously concealed and revealed, and this logically impossible state reaches its utmost refinement in The Ambassadors with the strategy of equating being, seeing, and doing, which seizes a void between two

⁵⁴ Cannon 51-58.

⁵⁵ Eric Haralson does this in his Henry James and Queer Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). About Strether, Haralson sees his homosexuality in his interest in Chad and Little Bilham. Haralson explains that a narcissistic love for a figure whom one thinks he would have become himself is one form of homosexuality and there is no need of explicit action to detect it between men. See 102-33.

⁵⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “The Beast in the Closet,” Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: U of California P, 2008) 182-212.

⁵⁷ James, “Art of Fiction” 50-51.

incompatible sets of ideas. Vision is versatile in James, concealing and revealing a moral position as well as sexual orientation.

For Forster, it is precisely this sexual indeterminacy and lack of carnality in James that is most irritating. With the ardent appeal of “only connect” the body and the mind, Forster always tries to find a way to write about the flesh, and by doing so marks out his wish to stand apart from James.⁵⁸ About the frail physicality in James, Forster has this much to say:

They are incapable of fun, of rapid motion, of carnality and nine-tenths of heroism. Their clothes will not take off, the diseases that ravage them are anonymous, . . . Even their sensations are limited. They can land in Europe and look at works of art and at each other, but that is all. Maimed creatures can alone breathe in Henry James's pages—maimed yet specialized. They remind one of the exquisite deformities who haunted Egyptian art in the reign of Akhnaton—huge heads and tiny legs, but nevertheless charming. In the following reign they disappear. (AN 142-43)

“Anonymous diseases,” “maimed creatures,” and “deformities”—Forster applies almost vitriolic words to Jamesian characters’ want of corporeality. This harshness may reflect the problem that Forster shares with James, of how to thrust the erotic and passionate body into a text when it is expected to take the form of a heterosexual relationship, when the author’s true interest lies elsewhere. The method taken by Forster is to introduce the masculine athlete (working or lower-middle class, not intellectual but full of virility) and to establish a homoerotic friendship between him and the aesthetic hero (upper-middle class, highly-educated, and physically weak) with the aid of a woman as a catalyst. This model is consistent throughout

⁵⁸ As for this ambition of Forster, a detailed account is found in Eric Haralson, “‘Thinking about Homosex’ in Forster and James,” Queer Forster, eds. Robert K. Martin and George Piggford (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997) 59-73.

his literary career.⁵⁹

In Where Angels Fear to Tread, the role of the athlete is played by the good-looking and wanton Gino, and it is Gino who opens Philip's eye to the body in many senses. First of all, there is Gino's baby, whose fate is the novel's main concern. This baby is not given any other definite human characteristic than his presence as a piece of flesh, a fruit of his parents' physical union. His name is never mentioned even by the father, and the pronoun used to refer to him is always "it." Perhaps all these are meant to strengthen the impression that the baby is introduced almost as the force of Nature itself. Caroline sees the power of it in the scene of Gino washing the baby: for her it serves as a primal scene with the mother absent, and, as she later confesses to Philip, it is then that she falls in love with Gino. She probably wishes to be in the picture herself, and this marks the moment of her sexual awakening. As for Philip, however, he simply gives the title of "the Virgin and Child, with Donor" to the sight (WAFT 126), and shows no more sentiment about it (in this religious motif, Gino's role as a father is significantly denigrated, being replaced by "Donor" with no blood connection to the baby—he is in the picture simply to admire the Virgin and Child.)

Before the moment of moral awakening, therefore, Philip needs to go through a physical torture. Back in Monteriano, the grief-stricken Gino torments Philip until he is more dead than alive. The violent scene in the

⁵⁹ For these two types of male character in Forster's novels, the aesthete and the athlete, see Joseph Bristow, Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885 (Buckingham: Open UP, 1995) 55-99.

dark chamber is so intense, and in a letter to a friend, Forster explains the necessity for it as follows: “P. [Philip] is a person who has scarcely ever felt the physical forces that are banging about in the world, and ~~I didn’t forget~~ he couldn’t get good or understand by spiritual suffering alone. Bodily punishment, however unjust superficially, was necessary too: in fact the scene . . . was sacramental.”⁶⁰ The improvement of Philip consists of two steps: the torture by Gino and the vision of Caroline, which are, in other words, the corporeal and the spiritual-visual stages. The body that he has so far slighted or neglected—as his words “I don’t die—I don’t fall in love” (WAFT 134) epitomizes—now avenges him in Gino’s ferocious attack. The slip of Forster’s pen in the letter, the crossed words “I didn’t forget,” might betray the author’s self-conscious effort to write about the body.

The problem is, by thus distinguishing the physical and the visual, Forster dismisses the Jamesian arcadia where being and doing reside in the field of vision, and Philip is consequently put forward into the world of—it cannot be anything else—heterosexual engagements. Again with the help of the athlete, he manages to fall in love with Caroline. In Sawston, Philip was entirely and callously indifferent to Caroline’s charm, having thought that “[s]he was good, quiet, dull and amiable, and young only because she was twenty-three: there was nothing in her appearance or manner to suggest the fire of youth” (WAFT 33). Caught in a monotonous life, Caroline in Sawston might be lacking in eye-catching attraction, but “the fire of youth” was latent and only waiting for the time to blossom as it

⁶⁰ Lago and Furbank 83-84.

later does in Italy; it has been hidden from Philip's eye until that of his own is kindled, but kindled by his male friend. Away in Monteriano, too, whenever he notices some beauty in her, it is that of a female figure in the painting. It is only after the ritual of the reconciliation of Philip and Gino "by ties of almost alarming intimacy" (WAF 153) that Gino turns Philip's eye to Caroline's physical charm:

He had reached love by the spiritual path: her thoughts and her goodness and her nobility had moved him first, and now her whole body and all its gestures had become transfigured by them. The beauties that are called obvious—the beauties of her hair and her voice and her limbs—he had noticed these last; Gino, who never traversed any path at all, had commended them dispassionately to his friend. (WAF 154)

What happens here is that the athlete sees the woman's "obvious" charm on behalf of the aesthete, and then transmits it to him. Philip has gone through the "path" leading to heterosexuality with the aid of Gino's masculinity, and as soon as he tries to go one step further, he realizes that Caroline is in love with Gino and he is still an outsider in life. After all, in the novel the intimate physical contact always happens between men, and, being denied an entry to the world of heterosexual romance, Philip not quite unwillingly retreats into the vision of Endymion. The invocation of this Greek myth in the final scene is particularly cunning, for Endymion is a beautiful boy loved by the goddess of moon. There is no knowing whether Philip's admiration points toward Caroline as the goddess or Gino as the boy. Not only in this last scene but also in the past scenes in which he was struck by their beauty, there always are Caroline *and* Gino, and Philip's vision of them caught in a static tableau has bifurcating effects: it makes the true object of his admiration unclear, and by doing so serves as an

ideological retreat. When the author tries to write about the body, the text at the same time betrays the inclination to recoil from it, since writing about the body takes the form of heterosexual love; this tension casts a shadow on the terminus of Philip's progress. In the last scene, Philip's sight is crucially introverted: "Philip's eyes were fixed on the Campanile of Airolo. But he saw instead the fair myth of Endymion" (WAF 160). It can be said that this last vision of Philip registers the inner urge to turn his back on the world, which he senses after going through an ordeal to remove the finest "lenses" from his eyes without a complete cure.

Chapter 2

From the Tourist Gaze to Formalism:

Travelling Italy in A Room with a View and Arctic Summer

As we have seen in the first chapter, the idea of being in a country as a tourist provides important material for Forster to develop his creative imagination. From the earliest short stories such as “The Story of a Panic” and “The Road from Colonus” (1904) to his last novel A Passage to India (1924), the protagonist’s encounter with a foreign culture and his/her moral, aesthetic, and emotional response toward it has been one of the most enduring themes of his fiction. Noticeably, there always appears the following pattern: a character is weary of the “touristy” experience abroad and longs to get outside its framework and make a direct contact with the place. The consequence is more often than not disappointing, or even destructive, and he/she ends up in realizing that one cannot leave behind the set of values implanted by one’s own culture. Nonetheless, Forster’s protagonists again and again set out on an expedition for the discovery of more authentic, “real” experience abroad. Tourism is a product of modernity and its transport technologies, and also, more significantly for our topic of visual experience, an archetype of modern activity in the sense of Martin Heidegger’s concept of the world picture, the world conceived and grasped as a represented object viewed by human being as the subject.¹

¹ The connection between tourism and Heidegger’s world picture is pointed out in Peter J.

When we are abroad, we see the culture there in the state of being filtered through the knowledge that we have already learnt from our domestic culture. Theoretically speaking, therefore, what is present to our eye is always a “representation” of the foreign culture in question; this sensation paradoxically creates the concept of its “unmediated reality” hidden beneath the surface. Therefore, it can be said that the tourist gaze is a particular mode of seeing which is avidly seeking knowledge exactly because it is always already distanced from it. This chapter will firstly examine how subtly Forster negotiates with this complex structure of the tourist gaze in his other Italian novel, A Room with a View (1908). The chapter will then turn to his unfinished piece Arctic Summer (1911), to examine how, when the narrative emphasis is less oriented towards the tourist expectation, another way of seeing the world, namely, the formalist gaze, makes an appearance. While the tourist gaze represents an eternal pursuit of knowledge, the formalist gaze works in a quite opposite way as we have seen in the previous chapter: it cuts off the visual experience from the moral universe. In Forster’s fiction these two interlace in many significant ways, offering keys to understanding the aesthetic and ethical problems with which his writing grapples.

1.1. The Eye’s Thirst for Authenticity: The Structure of the Tourist Gaze

Hutchings, “A Disconnected View: Forster, Modernity, and Film,” E. M. Forster: New Casebooks, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1995) 213-28 at 215. For the concept of the world picture, see Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (NY: Harper, 1977) 115-54.

When we think of the tourist gaze, we take it for granted that tourism means the act of seeing “sights.” However, Judith Adler’s “Origins of Sightseeing” reveals that “tourism” and “sightseeing” were not interchangeable terms until around 1800.² In the Renaissance period, the aristocratic traveler went abroad for *discourse* rather than for picturesque views or scenes: they conversed with scholars and diplomats at the foreign court for the benefit of their motherland. The late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries saw a gradual shift away from a discursivity identified with scholasticism and traditional authority toward “an ‘eye’ believed to yield direct, unmediated, and personally verified experience.”³ Over the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, with the ascendancy of Natural Philosophy and empirical individualism, an ideal of objectively accurate vision was developed, and the modern concept of sightseeing—“a historically new, overweaning emphasis upon the isolated exercise and systematic cultivation of the sense of sight”⁴—was initiated. The cool observation of facts was more important than anything else; in consequence, the travel writing of this age was devoid of personal, autobiographical touch, compared with those written in later ages.⁵ Also, Adler makes the point that in this period sightseeing meant observing not so much artwork or landscape as geography and building. It is not until the

² Judith Adler, “Origins of Sightseeing,” Annals of Tourism Research 16:1 (1989) 7-29.

³ Adler 11.

⁴ Adler 8.

⁵ Rather than the actual travelogue, in the eighteenth century it was literature that explored the emotionally educative aspect of travel, as Lawrence Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (1768) stands as a good example.

nineteenth century that this model of vision was taken over by a new discipline of the connoisseurship of the eye, which centers on the cultivation and display of individual “taste.” In its aesthetic transformation, sightseeing became a more impassioned, private activity—largely speaking, the concept we still maintain today. Summing up the historical vicissitudes of the concept of tourism, Adler says:

The practices of the contemporary sightseer, so often caricatured with his camera in tow, must ultimately be understood in relation to the historical development (and eventual popularization) of post-Baconian and Lockeian orientations toward the problem of attaining, and authoritatively representing, knowledge. They must be seen in relation to forms of subjectivity anchored in willfully independent vision, and in the cognitive subjugation of a world of “things.” Above all, they need to be understood in relation to that European cultural transformation which Lucien Febvre first termed “the visualization of perception.”⁶

If we extend Adler’s points further to the analysis of the tourist gaze today, it can be said that it is a peculiar mode of seeing in which one’s visual experience is firmly predetermined by previously given knowledge. In our contemporary world, one goes on a trip armed with information collected from guidebooks, photos, films, TV programmes, and so on: a visit to a place without any prior idea of it is simply inconceivable. The traveler proceeds with a guidebook, and visits the “sights” that it lists up for him. They are worth visiting because the guidebook says so, or, they are famous through the media. Other objects (sceneries, landscapes, buildings, or whatever), once judged as not really worth seeing, recede into background of the visual field to become practically non-existent. John Frow sees an

⁶ Adler 8. Lucien Febvre, Le Problème de l’incroyance au XVI-siècle (Paris: Michel, 1947) 473.

archetype of this mode of vision in the Japanese poet Basho's The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches (1689, English translation first published in 1966). Basho followed the path that another poet Kyohaku had traveled earlier, and in this expedition Kyohaku's poems worked as an ideal form for Basho's visual experience: "Just as the tourist guidebook stipulates an ideal core of interest in the sight. . . . The poem by Kyohaku provides a second modeling of the form for Basho, and his own poem confirms (like the tourist's photograph) not an empirical act of seeing but the congruence of the sight with the idea of the sight."⁷ Basho, as a prototype of the modern tourist, saw things according to *ideas* about them which he had gathered from his predecessor's work. When he exercises the tourist gaze, he sees the world with some primal idea in his mind, which is already a *representation* of the real—for Basho, it was Kyohaku's poem; for us, the information from various media. With respect to this semiotic structure, it can be said that the tourist gaze reads things as signs of themselves: a place, a gesture, or a use of language, are understood not as given portions of the real but as suffused with ideal types of the beautiful, the extraordinary, or the culturally authentic. Their reality is figural rather than literal, and therefore tourist expectancy is structurally doomed to be disappointed, since access to the type can always be frustrated.⁸

In this view, the tourist gaze can be thought of as one of the exemplary phenomena that reflect the steady decline of Western

⁷ John Frow, "Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia," October 57 (1991) 123-51, at 124-25.

⁸ Jonathan Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism," American Journal of Semiotics 1:1-2 (1981) 1-21.

ocularcentrism. The concept of tourism as sightseeing emerged together with the rise of Natural Philosophy, and people traveled distances to collect facts in the spirit of, as Francis Bacon once wrote, “I admit nothing but on the faith of the eyes.”⁹ Inevitably, however, the more became known about the world, the less there was left to be discovered and recorded. The aesthetic turn of sightseeing took place out of the recognition that the geographical regions within reach of the common European traveler had become exhaustively overdescribed, at least in their immediately apprehensible appearances.¹⁰ Consequently, the value of traveling came to be assessed by the amount of personal satisfaction one could derive from it. Hence the eye should be aesthetically trained to make the most of time away from home. Gone is the objective knowledge as the main purpose of sightseeing, and this coincided with the development of publishing circles over Europe. The popularity of William Gilpin’s series of “picturesque tours” over the last three decades of the eighteenth century and the flourishing of travel writing throughout the next century suggest the generally felt impulse and need for instructions in how to cultivate aesthetic sensibility. This kind of instructive medium has the effect of checking the work of empirical seeing (Basho’s case), and, when it thoroughly permeates a whole society (as it does in our present world), it can eventually annul not only the idea that the act of seeing leads to objective, authentic knowledge of the world, but also the very existence of such objectivity or authenticity.

⁹ Quoted in Jay 64. Francis Bacon, The Great Instauration. The Works of Francis Bacon. James Spedding et al., eds. Vol.4 (London, 1868) 30.

¹⁰ Adler 21-22.

2.2. Florence with No Baedeker: How Lucy Shakes Off the Tourist Gaze in A Room with a View

With its first half set in Florence, an epitome of “the Italian Renaissance” for most Victorians and Edwardians, A Room with a View contemplates the issues of the tourist gaze and the “authentic” experience abroad with details of striking historical accuracy. The heroine Lucy Honeychurch wanders the city with her indispensable Baedeker, purchases photos at Alinari’s shop, and meets a parson from the British colony. All of them, in one way or another, provide instructions in how to view the city, leaving little room for Lucy to decide herself what is worth seeing and what is not. Forster links this problem with her personal circumstances, her restricted view of the world. Having grown up in a typical Victorian middle-class family, Lucy has not yet developed her own values about life, and her improvement takes place with her emancipation from the tourist gaze.

The opening remark of Charlotte Bartlett immediately flings us into this problematic. She is complaining about not having a room with an expected view at The Pension Bertolini: “The rooms the Signora promised us in her letter would have looked over the Arno” (RV 23). For the British tourist, the view of the Arno, most likely with one or more bridges, was indispensable for their “authentic” experience in Florence: it was widely known by photographs, which offered, prior to their actual visits, the ideas

about how the city should look.¹¹ The disappointed Charlotte and Lucy then go downstairs for dinner to receive an unexpected offer: the Emersons, who are socially not equal to them, have a room with a view and offer to exchange rooms. The novel is about whether to accept or not to accept this offer, and all the social, aesthetic and personal concerns of the characters converge on this dilemma.

It is in the second chapter “Santa Croce with no Baedeker” that Forster most consciously puts into question the tourist and the tourist mode of the gaze. In this part, Forster probably had in his mind John Ruskin’s Mornings in Florence,¹² in which Ruskin recommends to those who visit the city with Murray to look up from their guidebooks and see things directly with their own eyes.¹³ On her first morning in Florence, Lucy receives a mock-Ruskinian offer from Miss Lavish, a writer posing as unconventional. She says that she shall soon “emancipate” Lucy from Baedeker as it does “but touch the surface of things . . . The true Italy is only to be found by patient observation” (RV 36-37). In response to the rapidly increasing number of tourists, both Murray and Baedeker started publishing guidebooks in the 1830s, and their names soon became

¹¹ John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen, eds., Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2005) 2-3. See also Graham Smith’s article in this book, “Florence, Photography and the Victorians,” 7-32.

¹² This is suggested in the note to page 40 (RV 239).

¹³ John Ruskin, “Mornings in Florence,” The Works of John Ruskin, eds. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, Vol. 23 (London: Allen, 1906) 285-457. See especially “The First Morning: Santa Croce” (295-311). In this section Ruskin often refers to Murray’s guidebook: for example, “Your Murray’s tells you that . . .” appears at least twice (297; 301). Also there are phrases such as “Walk straight to the chapel on the right of the choir (“k” in your Murray’s guide)” (296) and “Mr. Murray tells you that . . .” (306). As we are going to see in the following, this shows that his anti-Murray attitude is actually strongly dependent on the target of its criticism, and has created another tourist discourse, as perhaps already indicated in Ruskin’s own subtitle: Mornings in Florence: Being Simple Studies of Christian Art for English Travellers.

synonyms with travel handbooks. Their appearance was revolutionary in the history of travel writing: with them the distinction we have today between the “guidebook” (allegedly objective and scientifically accurate) and the “travel book or sketch” (personal, unsystematic, and impressionistic) emerged. The precise local information in detail immediately made both Murray and Baedeker indispensable for any tourist, but almost simultaneously, various media started commenting satirically on the tourist’s Murray/Baedeker-bound experience. This highlights a paradox that is ingrained with the advent of these travel guidebooks: “although they guided tourists with a truly unprecedented diligence and efficiency, the creators and managers of the new handbooks regarded their labors as enabling their readers to be more *independent* in their travel.”¹⁴ Forster, too, points out this irony through Lucy’s puzzlement when she is once literally emancipated from a guidebook. Just before going into Santa Croce, Miss Lavish sees her acquaintance and dashes off with Lucy’s Baedeker. Lucy goes into the church alone, only to find herself helpless in seeing things:

Of course, it must be a wonderful building. But how like a barn! And how very cold! Of course, it contained frescoes by Giotto, in the presence of whose tactile values she was capable of feeling what was proper. But who was to tell her which they were? She walked about disdainfully, unwilling to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date. There was no one even to tell her which, of all the sepulchral slabs that paved the nave and transepts, was the one that was really beautiful, the one that had been most praised by Mr Ruskin. (RV 40-41)

This scene captures how Baedeker’s (or it could be Murray’s) minute

¹⁴ James Buzard, The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 75. This study has a detailed account of the publication and development of Murray and Baedeker. See 65-77, and also 285-92 for Forster and Baedeker guidebook.

instructions have the undesirable effect of diminishing one's capacity to see and judge things for oneself. Santa Croce is full of tourists with "noses . . . as red as their Baedekers" (RV 41) moving to and fro with Mr. Eager, an earnest guide lecturing on the spiritual value of the place in a Ruskinian tone.

Most significantly, Forster's use of Baedeker does not simply repeat the traditional guidebook satire, but also advances a more fundamental question about the nature of tourist experience by showing how readily a Ruskinian anti-tourist guidance can be assimilated into the tourist discourse. The slabs that Ruskin highly praised in his "anti-Murray" Mornings in Florence and the Giotto frescos famously admired by Bernard Berenson for their "tactile value" are now listed among the "must-see" items of Santa Croce.¹⁵ Before identifying them, the tourist, like Lucy, may not even feel like looking around. This paragraph reveals Forster's awareness of modern tourism's devouring ability to accommodate the anti-tourist discourse. This impression may be reinforced when Forster sets Mr. Eager of all characters—his mock-Ruskinian aesthetic "eagerness" is described most ridiculously—to criticize the tourist experience. Hearing Lucy's honest remark that she is in Florence as a tourist, he replies:

'If you will not think me rude, we residents sometimes pity you poor tourists not a little—handed about like a parcel of goods from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, living herded together in pensions or hotels, quite unconscious of anything that is outside Baedeker, their one anxiety to get

¹⁵ The sepulchral slab here is that of Galileo Galilei. Ruskin thinks that its epitaph is the spirit of the Renaissance Florence, where philosophy was studied together with "useful arts" such as medicine, and the masters in these fields became the masters of public affairs too. See Ruskin, "Mornings in Florence" 305-11. On the other hand, the Giotto frescos and the word "tactile value" became well-known by Bernard Berenson, The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance (NY: Putnam, 1909).

“done” or “through” and go on somewhere else. The result is, they mix up towns, rivers, palaces in one inextricable whirl. You know the American girl in *Punch* who says: “Say, poppa, what did we see at Rome?” And the father replies: “Why, guess Rome was the place where we saw the yaller [*sic.*] dog.” There’s traveling for you, Ha! ha! ha!’ (RV 81)

As we will shortly see, the excessive aesthetic enthusiasm of a Mr. Eager, too, has a power akin to a Baedeker and prevents people from first-hand perception. Forster even goes so far as to make him recite a fictional anti-tourist episode from Punch.

In recent years, criticism on tourism has invented a new model opposed to the former distinction between “the tourist” (a debased figure who accepts without doubt the images supplied by the tourist industry) and “the traveller” (who is intellectual enough to seek and know the authentic experience). Anti-tourist arguments are seen to betray not only elitism but also what Ellen Strain calls “the illusion of demediating mediation,” which it shares with the very tourism it aims to attack. This illusion is the expectation that travel experience can strip away one’s own cultural baggage and renew one’s perception, which suffers from the deadening effects of everyday familiarity. Strain points out that this unquenchable longing for the authentic, the more “real,” is not a tension to be resolved or dismissed, but rather a defining feature of tourism from the beginning, and this would invalidate the distinction between the tourist and the traveller, as well as that between authenticity and inauthenticity.¹⁶ It could be argued that the insight that Forster shows in “Santa Croce with no Baedeker” approaches the sophistication of this model. Ruskin’s motto,

¹⁶ Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003) 3-5. I have consulted this book for the summary of preceding and ongoing arguments on tourism.

the “innocence of the eye,” is an appeal to cast away all the preliminary knowledge when one faces an artwork or landscape. But this principle itself is a byproduct of growing capitalism since it is essentially constructed out of the fear that people may lose aesthetic taste in an age of industrialization. As Forster sees it, therefore, Ruskin’s criticism is promptly swallowed up and appropriated by the capitalist system and ends up attracting more tourists to the places he has written about. Dean MacCannell regards the quest for authenticity in modern tourism as a reaction to the alienation caused by industrialization and the consequent fragmentation of modern society: a fading sense of reality and oneness with the world impels the tourist to go out to the so-called “primitive” society for something that his own culture has lost forever.¹⁷ In this view, Ruskin’s general preference for the Gothic over the High Renaissance shows this “tourist” impulse in the broad sense by turning to the more primitive and imperfect, and as far as this is the case, his criticism can never surpass modern industrialization, the very matrix which cultivates his aesthetic sensibility in the form of reaction against it.

It seems that, through tourism, Forster learned early and well that the approach to “the real” in culture or history always proceeds through some “prior textualization” and any attempt to escape it finds utterance only in another text.¹⁸ Many of his early short stories are set in Italy or Greece and reflect the weariness that Forster felt toward his fellow British

¹⁷ Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (London: Macmillan, 1976).

¹⁸ Buzard 291.

tourists during his own “Grand Tour” in 1901-2, after graduating from Cambridge.¹⁹ The majority of characters in these stories are typical “touristy” tourists, who are satisfied with ordinary sightseeing, and when there is an unexpected accident, even those who pretend to be adventurous turn out to be most conventional.²⁰ Just as Forster himself saw and disliked it, they travel in groups, stay at hotels which serve British foods, visit places where other British visit, and engage in idle talk. However, each story has one (usually male) character who is susceptible to something more genuine: for example, Eustace in “The Story of a Panic,” Mr. Lucas in “The Road from Colonus,” and Tommy in “Albergo Empedocle.”²¹ They make a contact with the spirit of the land (*genius loci*), and the result is puzzling and destructive. Their experience is of a nature which cannot be brought back to normal life. “The Story of a Panic” closes with a scene of Eustace’s escape at the cost of an Italian servant’s mysterious sudden death; Mr. Lucas grows uncommunicative and withdraws into senility; Tommy is diagnosed as insane and put into a lunatic asylum. In the end, Forster finds that there is no way to describe their transgression except to locate it outside the narrative; otherwise, it would fall into textualization and its power to criticize other characters’

¹⁹ The tour was made possible by the inheritance from his great aunt Marianne Thornton. For the details of the journey and Forster’s frustration with other British tourists, see Furbank 1:81-96 and Lago and Furbank 47-53.

²⁰ I have particularly Mildred, the heroine in “Albergo Empedocle,” in my mind here. In spite of all her talk about “re-creating the past through imagination,” she is horrified to see her fiancé truly identified with the past at a Greek ruin. As her father sees through it, she is actually a most conventional girl: “when it came to action she could be trusted to behave in a thoroughly conventional manner” (45). We are also told that it was Mildred “who generally held the Baedeker and explained it” (37). “Albergo Empedocle,” The Life to Come and Other Stories, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Penguin, 1975) 36-63.

²¹ “A Story of a Panic,” Selected Stories, eds. and intro., David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (London: Penguin, 2001) 1-23; “The Road from Colonus,” Selected Stories, 79-90.

touristy experience would become blunt. This is exactly what happens to the heroine of “The Eternal Moment,” another short story from this period. Miss Raby, the writer, was enchanted by a small unknown Italian town and wrote a novel about it. Twenty years later, she revisits it only to find that the whole place is engaged in tourism and deplorably vulgarized *because* her book made it famous. Her novel, written out of radiant memory and love for the place, has destroyed what she loved.²²

If any access to “the real” is done by textualization, which is one type of representation of course, the logical conclusion about the tourist gaze would also be that there is no possibility of sight’s being released from it. A Room with a View is, I would like to argue, a novel highly conscious of this, but nonetheless (or therefore) tries to place the heroine’s significant visual experience at a furthest point from the touristic one. A premonitory event happens a little after Lucy’s visits to Santa Croce. One afternoon at The Pension Bertolini, Lucy plays the piano, and, as she always does after music, feels more restive and adventurous than usual. So she goes out to the Alinari’s shop, hoping to come across “something big” (RV 60). However, the Alinari, a leading figure in Victorian photographic reproduction of Florence, is the worst place she can think of going to emancipate herself from the framework of touristy experience.²³ Not surprisingly, therefore, “though she spent nearly seven lire the gates of liberty seemed still unopened” (RV 61).

²² “The Eternal Moment,” Selected Stories, 161-91.

²³ For the Alinari’s shop, Graham Smith’s article has a detailed historical account (see note 8).

These photos are destined to be soon thrown away into the Arno, when she witnesses a murder at Piazza Signoria. Two Italians have a fight and one stabs another with a knife; at the sight of dying man's face Lucy loses consciousness and falls into the arms of George, who happens to be in the piazza (RV 62-63). In contrast to Lucy's so far almost exclusively visual experience in the city, "something big" takes the somatic form—the death of the Italian works as a catalyst, bringing the reality of life and death into the pleasant pictures of the Renaissance city, and flings Lucy into the world of love and sexuality.²⁴ Although it is much later that Lucy finally accepts the importance of what has happened, George immediately recognizes it and makes a symbolic gesture:

'I believe it was my photographs that you threw away.'
 'I didn't know what to do with them,' he cried, and his voice was that of an anxious boy. Her heart warmed towards him for the first time. 'They were covered with blood. There! I'm glad I've told you; and all the time we were making conversation I was wondering what to do with them.' He pointed downstream. 'They've gone.' The river swirled under the bridge. 'I did mind them so, and one is so foolish, it seemed better that they should go out to the sea—I don't know; I may just mean that they frightened me.' Then the boy verged into a man. 'For something tremendous has happened; I must face it without getting muddled. It isn't exactly that a man has died.'
 Something warned Lucy that she must stop him.
 'It has happened,' he repeated, 'I mean to find out what it is.' (RV 64)

Barbara Rosecrance suggests that the blood-stained photos thrown away here can be read as standing for Lucy's symbolic loss of virginity.²⁵ The

²⁴ For Forster's sacrificial use of the indigenous body to break with tourist experience and its problem, see Buzard 291-315. Graham Smith decodes the sexual connotation that the Alinari photos carry in this novel. See Graham Smith, *'Light That Dances in the Mind'* 53-59.

²⁵ Barbara Rosecrance, *Forster's Narrative Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 92. A relevant point is made by Goldman about the dying Italian's face. The man seems to have "an important message for her. He opened his lips to deliver it, and a stream of red came between them and trickled down his unshaven chin" (RV 62). Goldman suggests that "[t]his graphic image imposes a figure of menstruating female genitalia on a man's face. It is now that George Emerson appears" ("Forster and Women" 126). In this way the text invites us to read the scene as Lucy's sexual awakening, but, as Goldman also points out, this Lucy can be assimilated into the world of art, that of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, of

narrative also pins down a crucial change taking place inside George: “the boy verged into a man.” The above scene marks a transition in the lives of both Lucy and George through their first physical contact, and this coincides with Lucy’s emancipation from the ongoing touristic visual experience—the Alinari photos thrown into the river to reach the wide ocean.

The structure of the somatic cutting into the plane of the visual persists in the scene of George’s more direct advance toward Lucy in chapter six. It is Mr. Eager’s idea that they would drive up to Fiesole for “a view” of the whole city from the hillside. On the way there, the parson’s endless pedantic talk makes the ride so dull that nobody but the Italian driver and his girlfriend are really enjoying the expedition. Getting off the carriage, under Mr. Eager’s directions, the company tries to specify the exact point where a painter stood nearly five hundred years ago. Such an attempt to match a painting with a real place is an exercise of the tourist gaze in a broad sense—one tries to fit the reality to a pre-existing image in his mind—and induces an ironical end:

But it is not easy to carry the pictures of Alessio Baldovinetti in your head, even if you have remembered to look at them before starting. . . . The party sprang about from tuft to tuft of grass, their anxiety to keep together being only equalled by their desire to go in different directions. Finally they split into groups. (RV 85)

It is precisely when the tourist gaze uniting them collapses that Lucy is kissed: by the amorous driver who mistook her words, and Lucy is left to be alone with George. Forster describes the scene with intensely romantic

which photograph she brought at the Alinari’s (“Forster and Women” 126). This problem has something to do with the irony that I will explore in relation to the film version of the novel. See my discussion on page 95 onwards about the film as a conventional, romantic love story.

language to convey how Lucy's vision is liberated from the jumble of knowledge, instructions and warnings that she has been receiving from her seniors:

Light and beauty enveloped her. She had fallen onto a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to end. . . . From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth. . . . He [George] saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her. (RV 88-89)

What is really delightful to her eye is neither Florentine buildings nor artworks, but the beauty of violets on the outskirts of the city. The water imagery here expresses its refreshing effect on Lucy: as if she bathes in an alluring stream, it cleanses and renews her whole sensation, and then the man she loves kisses her. Forster is well aware that this Romantic, figurative use of Nature as a force to revitalize an individual perception cannot go on without restraint, and so Lucy is immediately called back to reality by her cousin calling her from above. The "pool" made of violets may be an equivalent of the other one in the novel: just as the puddle which George, Freddy, and Mr. Beebe hilariously swim in later stands for an atemporal utopia of homoerotic association,²⁶ the little sea of violets for a few seconds offers a view which has not yet been trampled on by tourism, and offers Lucy a chance to see the world differently from what she has known of it.

²⁶ For this reading of the swimming scene in *A Room with a View*, see Haralson, "'Thinking about Homosex' in Forster and James," 66-72.

In the English half of the novel, the tourist gaze, which in Florence took the overt form of Baedeker, the Alinari's photos, and Mr. Eager, is replaced by Cecil's viewing Lucy as a work of art. Defining the tourist gaze in the context of postmodernity, Strain draws our attention to sight's common ability to exoticize and fetishize difference—whether it is cultural, historical, sexual, or any other kind. Since the confrontation with difference involves a negotiation of boundaries in order to secure a sense of self, sight conducts the conversion of perceived reality into spectacle as a self-defensive act: “sights that threaten to reveal the fragility of the material supports of selfhood become sites of visual fascination ripe for the application of the gaze as a tool of control and analysis.”²⁷ When this process is carried out by one culture or nation as a whole, to what extent one's subjectivity is constituted in its framework becomes unproblematic and even invisible by directing his/her eye to the radical cultural difference lying beyond its realm. Strain therefore thinks that not only the tourist industry, but any other systematic solidification of this process of visual exoticization and fetishization of difference carries the nature of the tourist gaze.²⁸ Cecil's view of Lucy can be thought of as a version of the tourist gaze in this particular sense. After experiencing the difficulty of setting an aesthete to moral action in Where Angels Fear to Tread, this time Forster introduces an aesthetic male with more comic spirit and cynicism. Cecil Vyse is a well-educated, refined son of an upper-middle class family “in the grip of a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness,

²⁷ Strain 17.

²⁸ Strain 17-18.

and whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism” (RV 106). In Rome, where Lucy and Charlotte go to flee from the Emersons, Cecil has fallen in love with Lucy because she was “like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci’s, whom we love not so much for herself as for the things that she will not tell us. The things are assuredly not of this life” (RV 107-8). The reader knows the absurdity of this idea, for what she would not tell is nothing transcendental but her secret love for George Emerson. But Cecil’s idealization of Lucy did not falter even when his proposal was rejected:

She reminded him of a Leonardo more than ever; her sunburnt features were shadowed by fantastic rocks; at his words she had turned and stood between him and the light with immeasurable plains behind her. He walked home with her unashamed, feeling not at all like a rejected suitor. The things that really mattered were unshaken. (RV 108)

The male gaze often arrests a woman in such a painting-like stasis; in this paragraph, it is Cecil who says things and moves, while Lucy is silent and beautiful against the magnificent backdrops behind, unmoving. Her response and her movement are eliminated from his vision, and as long as this idealized image of her lasts, Cecil is undisturbed. Therefore, the chapter just after they finally become engaged is properly named “Lucy as a Work of Art” (RV 115). Hereafter, his interests lie in how he can strip away from “his Leonardo” the unsophisticated manner of the middle-class Honeychurches and make her an art of higher value. He connects her, as he says with some honesty, “with a view—a certain type of view” while Lucy always thinks of him in a room with no view (RV 125). Cecil frames his fiancée in his aesthetic gaze, and under the influence, Lucy feels rather as

if she were choking. This Lucy, Cecil's visual construct is, however, inevitably undermined when he comes to realize her physicality. In contrast to George's impulsive kiss, Cecil's is spoilt by his self-consciousness and fear of direct contact with the female body. He winces at Lucy's approval, and, "[a]s he approached her he found time to wish that he could recoil. As he touched her, his gold pince-nez became dislodged and was flattened between them" (RV 127). His view of Lucy has been so far working well, but when the distance between them is nullified, his privilege as a detached observer is gone; this is symbolically suggested by Cecil's pince-nez crushed between them. As in Forster's first novel, here again the body disturbs the world seen as a spectacle. Lucy is to leave behind both the cultural and sexual tourist gaze and marry George, who loves her as a whole being, both body and soul.

The irony is that this process makes A Room with a View the most conventional of all Forster's works with a marriage plot. This aspect of the novel is fully extended when it was turned into a film in 1985 as a romantic love story in an idyllic Edwardian setting. Directed by James Ivory, its aesthetic quality achieved a high reputation and eventually won three Oscars, but it was also criticized for its "evacuation of history"²⁹: the film was seen to emasculate the novel's social and historical consciousness and to look back at Edwardian England with full nostalgia.³⁰ One may notice

²⁹ Carl Freedman, "England as Ideology: From 'Upstairs, Downstairs' to 'A Room with a View'," Cultural Critique 17 (1990-91) 79-106 at 93.

³⁰ This is the view shared by many critics. Freedman's article above analyzes the film's impact on both English and American viewers in comparison with a BBC drama "Upstairs, Downstairs," which was broadcasted also in 1980s and presented an idealized version of the Edwardian. He examines the enthusiastic acceptance of them in terms of the reaction

that, in the film, Forster's sensibility toward the tourist gaze becomes also blunt, since the act of watching cinema itself can be a kind of tourism in the postmodern context. In the introduction to the 1989 edition of his influential The Tourist, MacCannell equates the state of being postmodern and our desire as a tourist: both suffer from the feeling of lost authenticity and history, and travel through time in the hope of finding some fulfillment.³¹ What is diagnosed as a postmodern symptom in the film is the reproduction of a collective recollection of the past. The relationship between the audience and the film is fundamentally different from that of modernism in the sense that the postmodern film requires the participation of the audience by appealing to their collective memory of the past.³² It asks the audience to visit the past with the tourist gaze, requiring them to be simultaneously immersed and detached.³³ That Ivory's A Room with a View intends this effect is obvious from the very first scene: it is a close-up of a door with a golden plate, "The Pension Bertolini," and a *peephole*. The next moment a window (not this door) opens to a side street of Florence, and there appear Charlotte and Lucy complaining about not having the Arno view. These two steps rapidly pull the audience into the world of cinema, turning him into a contemporary of the characters

against Thatcherism in England and the new imperialism of America in globalization. For a further critique of the film in the same line, see Hutchings's article cited above and also Ellen Strain, "E. M. Forster's Anti-Touristic Tourism and the Sightseeing Gaze of the Cinema," Postmodernism in the Cinema, ed. Cristina Degli-Esposti (NY, Oxford: Berghahan, 1998) 147-66. They take up all the film adaptations of Forster's novels in the perspective of, respectively, modernism and postmodernism.

³¹ MacCannell 1-16.

³² Degli-Esposti 5.

³³ Strain sees the desire for "distanced immersion" is an important characteristic that cinema shares with tourism. See Strain 27-31.

watching their experience with voyeuristic curiosity.³⁴

Although the film is acknowledged to be largely faithful to the original, it made some minor changes, and quite significantly, they are all concerned with the problem of the tourist gaze. Perhaps the most substantial change may be that Lucy's visit to Santa Croce and her later solitary walk to the Piazza are put together under the heading of "Santa Croce with no Baedeker." On her first morning in Florence, Lucy goes out alone after the piano *without* a Baedeker from the very beginning. She shows little puzzlement in Santa Croce, and when accosted by an importunate Italian guide, she flatly refuses him. Meanwhile Charlotte, in the place of Lucy, is taking a stroll with Miss Lavish to be criticized for her dependence on Baedeker. They get lost in the web of narrow alleys, but Miss Lavish commands Charlotte to put back her Baedeker, which she has hurriedly taken out to look up: "Two lone females in an unknown city," she says in the script, "that's like an old adventure. We'll simply drift." The Alinari's photographs are also replaced by common enough postcards. Lucy purchases them at a stand in the Piazza. There is not even a scene of her choosing them, and all the significance of the Alinari photo and Lucy's frustration about her regulated vision are omitted. These small but important changes on the whole create the impression that from the beginning Ivory's Lucy has more independence from the tourist gaze than the novel's Lucy. The scene where she turns down the Italian guide, which does not exist in Forster's original, too, strengthens this view. Perhaps as a

³⁴ For the audience as the character's contemporary, see Cairns Craig, "Rooms with a View," *Sight and Sound* 1:2 (1991) 10-13.

consequence, the kiss scene in Florence is presented differently. The film's Mr Eager does not give his lecture on the hill, being eager to have his tea. Lucy is led to George by the Italian driver, and finds him, not in the sea of violets, but simply standing in a field. The loss of violets is crucial: Lucy's visual shock as she suddenly comes across them (and her beloved) is gone, and there is nothing to imply the liberation of her vision. Lucy in the novel is kissed before she grasps the situation, and this highlights her innocence and ignorance; Ivory's Lucy, on the other hand, can see exactly where he is and approaches him to be kissed.³⁵

In the latter half of the film, "In England," Daniel Day Lewis's Cecil is much more of a caricature than Forster's, and the result is that the social significance of Lucy's rejection of him and her marrying George is considerably obscured. In terms of its class-consciousness, Forster's original is nearly a historical allegory. Lucy is a product of the particularly English blurring of bourgeoisie and gentry; Cecil belongs to a much wealthier and more socially prominent family who holds essentially "feudal" views and prides on having no careers or occupations; George is only one generation removed from the actual laboring class.³⁶ Cecil's aesthetic view of woman reflects not only his personal taste and possible misogyny but, as George intuits, the convention that people of his class have formed and maintained for ages: "He's the type who's kept Europe back for a thousand years. Every moment of his life he's forming you, telling you what's

³⁵ Hutchings 223.

³⁶ For the full social signification of Lucy's marriage and the novel's historical consciousness of class difference, see Freedman 96-97.

charming or amusing or ladylike, telling you what a man thinks womanly” (RV 186). Similarly, George’s belief in socialism and inchoate feminism is also a product of his class, and Lucy’s decision to marry him stands for the victory of progressive social thoughts on both class and gender levels in Edwardian England. The film version reduces this historical consciousness almost to the problem of individual characterization. There is little dialogue that clearly reflects the class to which Lucy, Cecil, and George respectively belong, and where there is one, its social implication is obscured. For example, in the novel, Charlotte asks of George his profession, which is “the railway,” and feels “very sorry that she had asked him” (RV 85). In the film, George courteously returns the same answer, but no response on Charlotte’s side is shown to us. Also, Cecil’s remark about the Emersons’ moving in Lucy’s neighborhood, “the classes ought to mix . . . There ought to be intermarriage—all sorts of things. I believe in democracy—” (RV 136) is highly ironical with the novel’s class consciousness and plot, but in the film it is cut short: Cecil only says “the classes ought to mix” in a factious manner, and Lucy turns him down peevishly. In the film, the difference between Cecil and George is mostly presented as that between a conceited pedant and a hearty, sporty youth. Most interestingly, it is not Lucy but Cecil that the film presents as if a figure in a painting. Perfectly dressed in black with high collar and spectacles, wherever he goes, he creates an atmosphere of unrealistic formality. He is always very upright, and his movement is somehow unnatural. The film’s strategy is nowhere more obvious than in the scene

where Lucy comes back from the tennis court to protest against Cecil's arrangement about Cissie Villa. Cecil says, "Don't move. Stay where you are. . . . Did you know you are a Leonardo?" He says this from the dark indoor, framed in a window. This makes a stark contrast to Lucy standing in the bright open-air, dishevelled from the tennis. The window is just big enough to contain his sitting height, and Cecil talking in the frame with self-conscious gesture is like a moving figure in a picture. Moreover, the film scarcely records things through Cecil's eyes; on the contrary, it frequently turns him into an object of observation. From his first appearance (Mrs. Honeychurch watching his proposing to Lucy through a window) to the scene following the break of engagement (Cecil sitting on a step of staircase and pondering alone), the camera tends to catch him in the closed, static space. Reversing Cecil's male gaze in the novel, it could be said, the film turns it back on to him and in effect succeeds in describing him as an anachronistic person as if he had newly emerged from an old painting.

Thus taking the edge off Forster's critique of the tourist gaze, the film seems to believe in its ability to reproduce the "authentic" Italy (as well as authentic Edwardian England) with its visual mastery, and also, in Lucy's ability to attain it. This is already seen in the scene of Lucy's first morning in Florence. The camera first shows two shots of the Arno and the bridges over it, and then turns to Lucy, who has just awakened. She steps forward to the window and opens it, and the much-expected vista of Florence—the river in front with the Duomo and the tower beyond—bursts in. The

combination of dramatic background music and the bell ringing captures the freshness of Lucy's encounter with the Renaissance city. Just a moment later, she is interrupted by impatient knocks on the door; Charlotte comes in to scold her for not being dressed for breakfast. An enlarged close-up of the Duomo, this time without Lucy in the picture, follows, and the scene comes to the end. The film adaptations of Forster's works set in Italy or India are marked with a number of such postcard-like (or "slide-show") scenes, which are motivated neither by a character's gaze nor by the traditional purposes of establishing shots. Such a moment allows the audience to see a sight before the characters do, often from a privileged viewpoint unavailable to them, and conforms the audience's preexisting conceptions of the country by "differing just enough from previous representations in order to claim authenticity as not just another canned image."³⁷ The snapshots of Florence bathing in the morning sun above creates the atmosphere that if others do not hinder, Lucy can make a contact with the "real" Florence, which is awaiting out there. Therefore, the film properly ends with the scene of Lucy and George kissing at the window with exactly the same view behind them. With the heroine attaining the room with a view both literally and metaphorically, the audience's nostalgic revisiting of the Italy and England of one century ago concludes. So a novel critical of the tourist gaze can produce a film which is most "touristy" in its impulse to recreate the past—this serves as one witness to Forster's farseeing insight about our never-ending desire to find

³⁷ Strain 186.

authenticity.

Before moving on to Arctic Summer, it may be of some use to briefly look at the TV drama of A Room with a View, which was broadcasted in the UK in the autumn of 2007. The most radical change from both Ivory's film and Forster's original is that it is set in Florence after the war, in 1922. Lucy, now a widow, revisits the city where she and George met and fell in love, and the whole story goes on in the form of Lucy's reminiscence. From time to time, between the pre-war episodes, the figure of the "present" Lucy looking back on her happiest memories is inserted; scenes from the post-war world are relatively colorless and indoor to make a contrast with the past scenes in the vividly colored open air.³⁸ George's death is not written even in Forster's sequel "A View without a Room," which he wrote fifty years after the novel's publication: during World War I George was a conscientious objector, and at the outbreak of the Second World War he was sent to battlefield, but he survived and returned to his wife and children (RV 231-33). With the creation of George's death, this TV drama offers a retrospection not only on Edwardian England but more broadly on a Europe which had not yet experienced the war, and might therefore be viewed as an innocent, prelapsarian place. This is clear from a long-shot near the last scene, in which a beautiful, postcard-like distant view of Florence and George's dead body lying in battlefield overlap. Personal memory, love, and family life—the war destroyed these things. This ending

³⁸ This is not the case with the last scene. Lucy takes a ride to Fiesole with the carriage driver who took her there before. There they talked about a little misunderstanding between them, which indirectly caused the first kiss of George and Lucy. Here the past and the present are unified in the outdoor scenery of Fiesole.

may reflect the sense of danger and fear that permeates our present society where we hear so much about terrorism and the unbalanced political situation. The TV version also seems to consciously give up the film's enthusiasm for offering a more "real" image of the past. The character's costumes, behavior, and way of talking are up-to-date and casual, and its indifference to historical accuracy sometimes brings the audience to the verge of disappointment.³⁹ It sacrifices the desire for authenticity for nostalgia and melodramatic effects, and the complex work of the tourist gaze is completely lost in this latest adaptation of A Room with a View.

2.3. Arctic Summer: Italy, a Shrine of Form?

After working on England's domestic problems in Howards End (1910), Forster once again turns to the issue of tourist experience abroad in his unfinished Arctic Summer (1911). Because of this chronological order, his failure in completing it is usually explained in relation to Howards End. As P. N. Furbank points out, for example, Forster may have felt at some unconscious level that the success of Howards End demanded of him either heterosexuality or a life independent of his devoted mother.⁴⁰ In terms of its theme, Forster was dissatisfied with its similarity to his previous work: it is "too like Howards End to interest me: a contrast again . . . I want

³⁹ It must be said that two scenes are particularly disappointing. Firstly, back in Pension Bertolini after their first kiss, Lucy saw half-naked George coming out of the bathroom, which seems to be shared by several guests, and they kiss again. This could not have happened in the Edwardian period. Also, the love scene on their honeymoon is very "modern," describing Lucy as sexually more passionate and aggressive than George.

⁴⁰ Furbank 198.

something beyond the field of action and behavior.”⁴¹ Also, it is well-known that in 1911 he wrote in his diary about the “[w]eariness of the only subject that I both can and may treat—the love of men for women and vice versa.”⁴² However, there seems to be another possible way to approach Arctic Summer: to examine how it treats a journey to Italy. With the first half set in Italy and the second half in England, Arctic Summer is structurally very similar to A Room with a View and, like Where Angels Fear to Tread, it opens with a scene at a railway station. Nonetheless, the Italy we encounter is very different now. Forster conceived the idea for this new novel on the day when Italy declared war on Turkey, and the disillusion that this political incident produced casts a shadow over a land previously full of romance and adventure.⁴³

Italy and some parts of Switzerland, through which the party of Martin Whitby travels, are described as the world already appropriated by modern industrialization. The opening scene is based on the chaos that Forster himself experienced on his way back from Italy just after the declaration of the war, and he emphasizes the inhumanity of the station in contrast to human conduct. It is “immense and modern, paid no heed” to the English tourists fighting against each other to secure seats; “she thought in terms of trains,” not bothered by human affairs; “she was indifferent to Cardinals and Kings, and to all but efficiency” (AS 3). This station no longer supplies a hilarious scene such as people seeing off Lilia

⁴¹ Quoted in Anita Desai, foreword, Arctic Summer, by E. M. Forster (London: Hesperus, 2003) vii-xi at ix.

⁴² Quoted in Furbank 199.

⁴³ Desai vii.

at the outset of Where Angels Fear to Tread: rather than being a place where people meet and part, now it is a huge mechanism operating beyond the power of the individual. As though he had been caught by its inhuman energy, Martin is nearly crushed under the train, but he is saved by a man who has “the look and gesture of a warrior” (AS 4). Although this encounter with Clesant March kindles his hidden Romantic vein later, Martin is described as an essentially modern, “civilized” man, and his cool complacency makes a striking contrast to the ardent response that the young characters in the earlier novels show toward both beauty and ugliness on their trips. The train is running through “industrial Switzerland” without much to see, but Martin takes it as it is: “It was a bastard country, forgotten as soon as seen, and grievous to the aesthetic eye. But *our tourist* had long since taken himself in hand. He knew that much of the earth must be dull and commercial, and that to revolt against her is ridiculous. Until she changed, his own thoughts contented him” (AS 5, emphasis added). Martin is a tourist, but not always one who is watchful enough to seize the authentic experience. Perhaps it is going too far to say that he has sensed the disappearance of authenticity, but he has at least admitted that it is becoming more and more unapproachable, and a large part of the earth does not supply it.

As if to replace the enervated tourist gaze, the novel registers a germ of another type of gaze—the formalist view of the world, which Forster at that time most probably learnt from the aesthetics of his friends Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Fry was welcomed into the circle gathered around Clive and

Vanessa Bell at 46 Gordon Square in 1910-11. As an elusive but nonetheless familiar visitor there, Forster must have had plenty of occasions to hear about the theory that Fry and Bell evolved. In order to secure the possibility of new, non-imitative art liberated from representation, in the essays later collected in Vision and Design (1920), Fry painstakingly severs art from life and moral concerns.⁴⁴ Stimulated by Fry's argument, Bell puts forward a far more radical formalism in Art (1914). He claims that the only essence universally seen in all kinds of art is "the significant form," a particular set of lines, colors, and compositions, which have the effect of generating the aesthetic emotion completely detached from the plane of daily life.⁴⁵ Arctic Summer can be read as Forster's initial response toward such theories of Bloomsbury aesthetics, through which he rethinks the formalist gaze he once labeled as a sign of moral blindness in his previous novels. It seems quite significant that he turns to their aesthetics when his tourist expectancy toward Italy is disillusioned, almost as an alternative to it. Forster's anxious feeling about this shift is notable in Arctic Summer—all the more so because of its fragmentary state.

The year of 1911 saw at least two direct contacts between Forster and Fry other than their private associations. Forster commissioned from Fry a design of the end-papers for his The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories,

⁴⁴ See Fry, especially "Art and Life," "An Essay in Aesthetics," and "The Artist's Vision."

⁴⁵ See Bell. In Art, which was originally published in 1914, Bell declared his debt to Moore's Principia Ethica: his concept of aesthetic experience strongly echoes Moore's philosophy, laying its foundation on the viewer's state of mind, which is temporarily cut off from his/her existence in the materialistic reality. In the preface to the 1949 edition, Bell admits the boldness of his argument written in his youthful days. More details of Fry and Bell's theory and an extended discussion on it are found in the chapter four on Woolf.

which was published in the same year.⁴⁶ Fry, who was engaged in a series of portraits of his friends, also asked if Forster would sit for him as a model. According to Elizabeth Heine, what seemed to have happened at one of the sittings was that, under the stimulus of discussion with Fry, Forster revised two or three chapters of Arctic Summer almost at once. A diary entry for 24 November shows his excitement after a visit to Fry's house:

Returned from Fry's yesterday in an exaltation that has not yet subsided. I saw what he was up to—to clear Art of reminiscences. Romanticism the enemy. To paint the position of things in space. But I do not like him best when he succeeds, though he has a wonderful unsentimental picture of a town. . . . He and his house always invigorate, but never before so strongly. I felt I could do anything and have worked better than usual today.⁴⁷

Many factors suggest that Forster may have had Fry in his mind as a model for the protagonist of his ongoing novel: Martin's Quaker upbringing, his relationship with each of the parents (he and his father remained on good terms, but it was his mother who educated him), and his winning a scholarship for Cambridge—all correspond with the biographical facts about Fry.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as Forster wrote down honestly in his diary, he was not thoroughly fascinated by his friend's theory: he does not like him "best when he succeeds."

Both Forster's excitement about Fry's theory and his moderate expression of the hope for something else find their equivalents in Martin's progress. In a passage where Martin continues to look at the monotonous

⁴⁶ Furbank 199 and 205. Furbank's analysis of Arctic Summer in relation to Forster's association with Fry (205-10) is also insightful: "the novel turned," he says, "in a sense, on Martin's unlearning of Fry's doctrines" (207).

⁴⁷ Quoted in Elizabeth Heine, introduction, Arctic Summer and Other Fiction by E. M. Forster, eds. Elizabeth Heine and Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E. M. Forster, Vol.9 (London: Edward, 1980) vii-xxxv at xviii, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry: A Biography (London: Hogarth, 1940). Fry as Martin's model is suggested by Desai, viii.

landscape outside the train window, the influence of Fry is most explicit:

The train ran downward into a beauty that admits romance but is independent of it. Youth demands colour and blue sky, but Martin, turned thirty, longed for Form. Perhaps it is a cold desire, but it can save a man from cynicism; it is a worker's religion, and Italy is one of its shrines. When the glamour of her art and of her nationalism have faded, and the last attempt to exploit her past is over, the Alps will still be on tiptoe for flight, as for Bellini, for Mazzini, the Apennines will still respond across the Lombard Plain. Martin had entered her often before, but never with such sensations; he saw a quality that he would have despised ten years ago. She, like himself, had abandoned sentiment; she existed apart from associations by the virtues of mass and line: her austere beauty was an image of the millennium towards which all good citizens are cooperating. (AS 12)

Here terms such as “Form” and “apart from associations by the virtues of mass and line” show the direct influence of his friend's aesthetics. Unlike Forster's younger protagonists (and probably unlike the author himself at the time when he created them), Martin has little hesitation in accepting the formal beauty of Italy. Even when the “glamour of her art” that the Victorian enthusiasm over Renaissance eagerly excavated, and the splendor of “her nationalism”—legendary episodes of Garibaldi and his followers—are shadowed by Italy's industrialization and its declaration of war, the formal beauty of the country is left untouched to keep it admirable in one's eyes. The desire for Form is “a cold desire,” but it saves people confronted with Italy's decline from sinking into entire cynicism. What is equally important in this passage is that here Forster talks about the impulse for Form still in relation to the outer world: it is a flight from the undesirable reality. One may find that he is still desirous of more than Form in his heart in a tentative expression such as “a beauty that admits romance but is independent of it”: beauty exists regardless of whether it supplies romance or not, but this is not the same as that the seeds of romance are eradicated from it. In this respect, a paradox seems latent in

Forster's use of the formalist ideas in Arctic Summer: he gives his approval of them in order to go on worshipping Italy, and ultimately, to preserve the possibility of treating it as a land of romance.

The story decidedly takes a romantic turn when Martin comes across one particular fresco near Milan. Since Bloomsbury formalism is mainly related to the visual arts, for Forster, this is an appropriate enough step in order to keep some distance from its influence. Martin visits a rural village called Tramonta with his wife Venetia and her mother, and there he has a revelatory experience. To Martin, this Tramonta is a little idyllic retreat from modernity. There seems no class consciousness in the village, and one can see "three gentlefolk, a bailiff, a farm-labourer, and a smartish chauffeur, eat the bread of angels together" (AS 29). The permission that Martin purchased in Milan from a vulgar man embodying "the worst bourgeoisie in Europe," "peasants gone wrong" (AS 23), is not required for the entrance to the castle. Away from the urban city, Martin's "cold desire" for Form starts giving way to a mild expectation for something else: "the jollity of the day was, for Martin, tinged with Romance. He moved into a half-forgotten world. He saw a castle, beautiful indeed in form and substance, but recalling some higher beauty" (AS 29). Then he finds the figure of the "warrior," the youth who saved his life at the station, in the medieval fresco. It is not the visible similarity that strikes him, but "the spirit, the expression..." (AS 31). Venetia, a typical "new woman" educated in Newnham College (the only college open to women at Cambridge at that time), does not take him seriously and says that the warrior might be

Clesant March's ancestor. But Martin is strangely touched and makes a note: "very moving: warriors about to fight for their country and faith', and was amazed at what he had written, so little resemblance did it bear to his usual art criticisms. Another hand might have guided his pencil" (AS 32). This incident is revelatory not only because he is moved by the theme of the fresco, which does not accompany a formal completeness, but also because his seeing a real person in an artwork marks a point where art and life converge in his mind. He could not have this lively aesthetic experience unless, in spite of their later unpleasant meeting in Milan, he is still impressed by Clesant's heroic behavior at the beginning. His admiration for Clesant is further strengthened by an unfortunate accident at a cinema that follows: frightened at a fire, Martin leaves behind his lame chauffeur and escapes to the outside alone. This event sets him to contemplate seriously on his cowardice during the emergency, and he writes a letter to Clesant in the hope of paying due respect to his chivalric braveness.⁴⁹

That Forster himself was never so much inclined to bathe in the formal beauty of art is clear in "Not Looking at Pictures" (1939). In this short essay, Forster is talking about the difficulty of looking at paintings without thinking about other things. The mind always intervenes, and

⁴⁹ The scene at the cinema may be important as one of Forster's few comments on the art of cinematography in its early days. Forster barely masks Martin's elitist antipathy toward this new public amusement: "The art of the future! He did not honestly love it. Fearful of being superior, he laughed and chatted and was rewarded by something sufficiently comic. . . . Insidious distortion of life, unfused by the imagination! It seemed to Martin that it must do infinite harm, and that the dreams of the moralist and the poet were guttering down together into a blur" (AS 41-42). It is also significant that it is here at the cinema that Martin's cowardice becomes clear, while he was previously so moved by the fresco, whose theme was medieval chivalry. This may reflect the hierarchy of value that Forster (and perhaps most of his contemporaries) unconsciously created in his mind against various different kinds of visual art.

what the eye perceives is immediately mixed up with various thoughts: “They were intended to appeal to the eye, but, almost as if it were gazing at the sun itself, the eye often reacts by closing as soon as it catches sight of them. The mind takes charge instead and goes off on some alien vision.”⁵⁰ The little possibility of looking at them as they are is suggested by the fact that we can scarcely see the sun directly.⁵¹ Forster admits that he is not good at looking at pictures, and this amuses Roger Fry, with whom Forster went to the gallery from time to time. Fry enjoyed being with “someone who scarcely ever saw what the painter had painted.”⁵² With his help, and after his death, with that of Charles Maunon, Forster learnt how to look at paintings in terms of their formal beauty such as composition (here Forster eagerly explains a Giorgione and a Titian, whose “diagonal” composition is easy to observe) and color, but so far his success has been limited and “something is sure to intervene.”⁵³ In this essay, or anywhere else, Forster is never explicitly critical of the aesthetic practice of his friends, but neither does he seem really vexed at not being able to enjoy what they seek after so keenly.

What may be least satisfactory about the aesthetics of Fry and Bell is that it does not supply a convincing explanation about how form produces profound aesthetic emotion, and how that emotion is entirely different

⁵⁰ E. M. Forster, “Not Looking at Pictures,” *Two Cheers for Democracy* 126-29 at 126. Note that this remark has similarities to Woolf’s, “the mind’s eye is only by courtesy an eye,” which I will examine in detail later in chapter four.

⁵¹ Here it can be also said that Forster deliberately dethrones the sun as a longstanding, privileged metaphor—the radiating centre of the universe and a symbol of truth and intellect since the Greek age.

⁵² Forster, “Not Looking at Pictures” 126.

⁵³ Forster, “Not Looking at Pictures” 127.

from any other human feelings. Fry is probably aware of this lapse and mentions the “scientific” method that analyzes the aesthetic emotion in terms of the physical reaction aroused in the viewer.⁵⁴ Following Bernard Berenson’s well-known theory of “tactile values” in The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance (1896), Fry explains that each of what he calls “the emotional elements of designs”—the rhythm of the line, mass, space, light and shade, and color—causes “emotions in us by playing upon what one may call the overtones of some of our primary needs”: rhythm appeals to muscular activities, mass to our adaptation to the force of gravity, and so forth (VD 24). But how these physical reactions can be “emotional” remains still unclear. Here one may add that this theory of Berenson is particularly disliked and ridiculed by Forster in A Room with a View. In 1907 Forster read Berenson’s book only to find it “oh so very badly written” (RV 237). It was published under the influence of William James’s The Principles of Psychology (1890), which ignited the flourish of “scientific” art criticism.⁵⁵ James thinks that aesthetic enjoyment occurs due to a feeling of life-enhancement produced by an acceleration of the ordinary process of physical perception, and British popular art critics such as Berenson and Vernon Lee eagerly investigated this mechanism to explain aesthetic sensibility more objectively than before, with what they thought “scientific” accuracy. For Forster, however, for whom aesthetic experience is always private and individualistic, such an approach is apparently not very

⁵⁴ J. B. Bullen, introduction, Vision and Design by Roger Fry, xi-xxv at xv-xvi.

⁵⁵ For the influence of The Principles of Psychology on the British art critics living in Florence, see Law and Østermark-Johansen 196-203.

convincing, and he ridicules Berenson by repeating the phrase “tactile values” as many as four times only in “Santa Croce with No Baedeker” (RV 35; 43; 46).

Clive Bell, on the other hand, does not succeed any better than Fry in analyzing the relationship between form and aesthetic emotion. His usually decisive and bold style of writing often falters when it comes to this problem. For example, talking about our intellectual recognition of the right form, he mentions the question of “whether it was the forms themselves or our perception of their rightness and necessity that caused aesthetic emotion,” but he leaves it unanswered.⁵⁶ Another example is found where he examines why certain arrangements and combinations of form cause emotion. Bell says that it is because they express the emotion that the artist feels when he or she, in the rare moment of aesthetic vision, sees objects as not means but pure forms. But Bell also admits that we cannot know what the artist really feels, and his efforts to eliminate the possibility that some “impurities” (thoughts concerning other aspects of his life) are not very successful: “The ultimate object of the artist’s emotion will remain forever uncertain. But, unless we assume that all artists are liars, I think we must suppose that they do feel an emotion which they can express in form—and form alone.”⁵⁷ A little later he concludes: “I am unwilling to return a positive answer. I am not obliged to, for it is not an aesthetic question. I do suggest, however, that it is because they express an emotion that the artist has felt, though I hesitate to make any pronouncement

⁵⁶ Bell 26.

⁵⁷ Bell 57.

about the nature or object of that emotion.”⁵⁸ The aesthetics of Fry and Bell was formed not only as a reaction against Victorian, Ruskinian moral art criticism but also marked a departure from the Kantian, romantic notion of ineffable beauty by reifying the cause of our aesthetic experience in the visible form such as lines, colors and compositions. But it has the remnant of romantic thoughts too in that it explains art in terms of our subjective experience and emotion, and therefore inevitably sounds vague in places. As their misunderstanding and disapproval of Cubism in later years shows, neither Fry nor Bell was ever so decidedly willing to uproot art from the plane of the world that we inhabit, and in this view, their formalism halts at “a strand of modernism,” one step before Cubist abstraction.⁵⁹

Perhaps it is because of this ambiguous position that their aesthetics attracts Forster and, as we will see in chapter four and five, Woolf, but simultaneously makes them critical of it. As long as emotion and subjective experience are concerned, it is hard to make a clear line between the purely aesthetic feeling and the rest of our emotional life, and therefore when a visual art makes an appearance in their fiction, there always is some link between its aesthetic value and the character’s sentiment about his or her own life. Through Martin’s experience in *Tramonta*, Forster tries to excavate the romantic vein in Bloomsbury formalism by showing that,

⁵⁸ Bell 59.

⁵⁹ For more about their dislike of abstraction, see James Beechey, “Defining Modernism: Roger Fry and Clive Bell in the 1920s,” Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999) 39-51 especially at 42-43. Beechey argues that Fry and Bell’s praise for Jean Marchand, an obscure name today, is suggestive of “their preference for a strand of modernism that maintained a direct concern with the experience of nature [as they saw in Paul Cézanne]” (43).

when a character has a really meaningful aesthetic experience, it certainly has some connection with his or her own life. Emotion is a faculty cultivated by everything that happens in one's life; a beauty independent of reminiscence may be enticing as a theory, but in Forster's eyes, alone, it cannot bring about an intensely emotional moment and there is no such thing as an independent aesthetic emotion.

I. A. Richards, who was also much influenced by Moore at Cambridge (but later grew out of the influence) proposed his method of criticism based on what may be regarded as an equivalent of what Forster and Woolf attempt in fiction. In Principles of Literary Criticism (1924), he criticizes all modern aesthetics after Kant for its common assumption that "there is a distinct *kind* of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experiences."⁶⁰ Among the critics Richards criticizes by name, Lee, Fry and Bell figure prominently. Admitting that they are "post-Kantian" in their efforts to analyze aesthetic experience by direct inspection, Richards points out that they still privilege it as different from any other kind of experience and he argues that we should start thinking about art on the same plane as other real experiences in life.⁶¹ To explain one's encounter with art objects by words such as construction, design, form and so on, as if they possess some inherent qualities, should be avoided since they are "more often than not mere *vacua* in discourse, for

⁶⁰ I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, 1924 (London: Routledge, 1967) 6.

⁶¹ Richards refers to Vernon Lee's Beauty and Ugliness, which introduced the word "empathy" into the vocabulary of English aestheticism. Lee and Berenson had an argument over which of them first adopted the James-Lange theory into art criticism.

which a theory of criticism should provide explainable substitute.”⁶² Richards’s criticism is also directed to Moore’s ethics as the origin of this trend in art criticism: Moore’s definition of good as the state of mind cut off from anything external is “a curious survival of abstractionism,” that leads nowhere: “such an arbitrary full stop.”⁶³

Though the main concern of Principles of Literary Criticism is a method of analyzing poetry, Richards extends it to art criticism, too. The chapter called “On Looking at a Picture” can be regarded as a theorization of what Forster expresses more loosely in “Not Looking at Pictures.” What is remarkable about Richards’ ideas here is that he sees different types of activities in our viewing of a picture. When we say “I see a picture,” Richards argues, we may mean that we see the pigment covered surface; or the image on the retina cast by this surface; or certain planes or volumes in what he names the “picture-space,” which is our mental image of it. In each case, the referent (“a picture”) is different. In the first case it is the picture, the work of art, itself as a source of sensuous stimulus; in the second, the effect that the stimulus created on the retina; in the third, the complex response “made up of perceivings and imaginings due to the intervention of mental structures left behind by past experience, and excited by the stimulus.”⁶⁴ In order to explain this at least three-step process, Richards employs a mixture of behaviorism and neurology at their early stage.⁶⁵

⁶² Richards 12.

⁶³ Richards 30.

⁶⁴ Richards 114-15.

⁶⁵ Ann Banfield points out that not only Richards but also Fry and Woolf used the language of the early behaviorism and neurology in their writing. See her “I. A. Richards,” ed. Patricia Waugh, Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide (Oxford: Oxford UP,

The eye is peculiar among sense organs as its receptor, the retina, is a part of the brain, instead of being a separate part connected to the brain more remotely by the peripheral nerve. Richards thinks that this closeness to the brain is the reason why in our visual experience it is almost impossible to separately deal with the actual, physical perception and the images and thoughts aroused in the mind by the stimulus.

This view of Richards paradoxically serves as another indicator of the widening gap between seeing and knowing, arousing one's attention to the inappropriateness of taking our visual experience as a coherent, univocal action. The term "see" can denote either the direct object of gaze, or the physiological mechanism of the eye, or the subject's mental response toward the object. A consensus about the act of seeing is gone, and Richards even states that the verb "see" should be avoided since it is "a term which is treacherous in its ambiguity."⁶⁶ Significantly, Richards adopts the word "sign" to the first two steps: the physical surface of the canvas and the retinal impression of it are a sign, "but a small part of the whole final product, an all-important part it is true, the seed in fact from which the whole response grows."⁶⁷ If the aesthetics of Fry and Bell, as well as that of Berenson and Lee, seeks the unification of the object and the subject in the visual experience with their assumption that the viewed object produces the correspondent, "right" aesthetic emotion (and nothing else) in the subject, Richards, on the contrary, conceptualizes a perceptual distance

2006) 96-106 at 100-101.

⁶⁶ Richards 114.

⁶⁷ Richards 115.

between them and calls the criticism ignorant of it as “*vacua* in discourse.” For Richards, the relationship between the visual art and the viewer is the same as that between the sign and the reader in literature. This complex process of interpretation always involves thoughts and experiences that one stores daily, and therefore, it is no use talking about one’s aesthetic experience and one’s mundane existence as if they are distinct, unrelated matters. The difficulty of looking at pictures without the intervention of mind that Forster light-heartedly complains of in “Not Looking at Pictures” finds in Richards’s moral literary criticism a theoretical support.

What Forster tries out in the English half of Arctic Summer seems intended to explore this bridge between art and life through Martin’s friendship with Clesant. However, it does not develop very well and the novel is left unfinished. Forster’s own explanation of this failure, he wrote in 1913, is that Clesant is “a Knight errant born too late in time.” In the age of “patient good-tempered labour, not chivalry,” Clesant’s ability to carry out the right conduct at the right moment does not find a proper issue to devote itself to: on the contrary, at the end of the fragment, his relentless persecution sets up his twin brother Lance to shoot himself.⁶⁸ Much later in 1951, he read the first Italian half at the Aldeburgh Festival and frankly admitted that he thought the rest of the novel inferior in quality as he had not known what was going to happen in it.⁶⁹ The seed of Romance, of which Martin caught a glimpse in Tramonta, finds no soil to grow upon in England—this is quite a different situation from A Room with

⁶⁸ Quoted in Desai ix.

⁶⁹ See AS 85-86, note 16.

a View, in which a romantic experience abroad can develop in the form of a heterosexual union back home. In this sense, the difficulty of Arctic Summer could be interpreted along the same lines as the somewhat disturbing ending of Where Angels Fear to Tread (the author's homoerotic interest in Clesant and Lance is scarcely masked when he described their intimacy), but another reason may be sought after in Martin's characterization. He is introduced as a new type of protagonist with a "cold desire" for Form, which is fundamentally irreconcilable with the romantic inclination that he showed at Tramonta: once he leaves the place that inspired him, the romanticism inside him finds it difficult to grow.

The English half of the novel contains some remarks from which we could guess more about Forster's ambivalent feelings toward formalism. This part of the novel makes a contrast between the distinctly religious and politically conservative atmosphere of the March household in the north and Martin's flat in London, where his family leads their urbanized life. Hearing about his nephew's encounter with Martin in Milan, Mr. Vullamy, who knows Martin at Cambridge, gives his opinion against him as follows:

'Whitby's the age,' he said rather sententiously, 'or what gets termed the age, though it's made of sterner stuff really, thank God. . . . I object to him really as an example of a type which is poisonous and spreading. Poisonous is too strong a word for it—that's the trouble. Mind, boys, you mustn't repeat this, for I know nothing against Whitby, who is an industrious and honest government servant. I wouldn't mind him if he didn't propagate the type and its ideas with such rapidity. He's against morality—but quietly, mind you, quietly; against religion, but quietly; against the Throne and all that we hold dear in the same way. Lance's Socialist on Bramley Down is open: we know where we are with him. The country's real danger is these crawling non-conformist intellectuals. A big war will clean them out—but till it comes—' (AS 56-57)

As the novel is also critical of the hypocritical sides of Mr. Vullamy's character, his objection to Martin should be taken into account with some

reserve.⁷⁰ Still, this passage seemingly reflects some vague uneasiness that might be generally felt about the dispassionate outlook on the world, like Martin's, at that time. By the standard of Mr. Vullamy's Victorian moral principles, an attitude that mildly rejects any moral authority—be it the God, the king, or any other kind—is to be labeled as “immoral,” but if it is so without any conspicuous sign, then it spreads quickly and easily. This could be taken as an indirect comment on Moore's ethics as well as the theory of Fry and Bell, which admit intrinsic values in the joy of seeing an artwork. Viewed in this light, it is not too far-fetched to recognize Forster's uncertain feeling about an amoral state of looking that we saw in Where Angels Fear to Tread still lingering in Mr. Vullamy's comment. As a novelist, whose medium is not the static world of visual art but language, Forster never successfully imagines any type of gaze irrelevant to the viewer's moral existence.

On the other hand, however, the impulse to see the desire for Form as somehow redemptive persists to the end and makes it harder to accurately locate the novel's distance from formalism. At his London flat, Martin has one of his witty conversations with Venetia and Dorothea. Though it is a kind of rough sketch rather than a fully developed one and its meaning is not easy to pin down firmly, they are talking about the importance of getting recognition from others over some meaningful experience in one's life. The following part may be especially telling about Forster's unique

⁷⁰ Later when they meet at Cambridge, Martin is disgusted by his dignified but heartless speech about Lance's being sent down: “Mr Vullamy was fundamentally unkind, and loved neither of his nephews at bottom—he was only proud of them” (AS 82).

view of Form:

[Martin says,] ‘ . . . Dear me if one were isolated—how absolutely useless one would be.’

‘Naturally,’ said Venetia.

‘But you and I and Dorothy in particular. We’ve crawled into little cells and there we’re all right. But plunge us in the infinite or the sea, or one of those things, and we drown.’

Dorothea asked him why he did not call himself a pessimist and have done with it. He answered, quite simply: ‘Because I retain this vision of Form. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. You and Nettie showed it to me years ago.’

‘Form in civilization as it is, or as it will be?’

‘As it will be. What I do in my little cell at the Treasury, helps to build it up.’ (AS 71-72)

Though not seriously, here Martin too sighs over the loss of common moral standards from a different angle from Mr. Vullamy’s. The first sentence may be taken as an allusion to Moore’s ethics. In Moore’s definition, the good should have intrinsic value in absolute isolation from other things; under this criterion he singles out personal relationships and the beautiful. Here Martin puts into question the worth of such a relationship: he, his wife, and Dorothea share their thoughts and values all the time, and there, in their own “little cell,” they are secure and comfortable. But when one runs into those with different sets of values, of whom for Martin Clesant March is a symbolical figure, can one go on undisturbed? It is here that Form comes in: Martin understands it as something more universally recognizable, and therefore consoling. Neither Fry nor Bell suggests even slightly that their theory of Form is a kind of escape from the fragmented reality, but in Forster’s mind, he seems adamant that this view of Form may be a sort of salvation, which indicates that he still thinks about it in relation to the moral universe.

This qualified formalism appears later in his post-war essay “Art for

Art's Sake" (1949), which is generally regarded as Forster's aesthetic credo. He advocates art as the only self-contained entity that offers order. It should be noticed that this belief of his is formed against the world which was ravaged by two world wars and would be intensified by the advancement of science and technology in the future. Forster thinks that, though it varies from generation to generation, form is a requirement to give a discernible shape to an aesthetic order: "But form of some kind is imperative. It is the surface crust of the internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order."⁷¹ In an age when only chaos is found in daily life and history, Forster believes in form as the indispensable substance of aesthetic order. When Arctic Summer was written, Europe was already advancing toward the Great War, and, inspired by his friends' formalist theory, Forster presumably developed his own idea of form in the face of this political instability. At that time, however, he was not so clearly appreciative of it as he is in "Art for Art's Sake." Arctic Summer still carries the romantic expectation about travel—away from one's home, one may have a chance to renew one's sensibility and get to the core of what one has really wanted. In this view, the incompletion of Arctic Summer may be seen as a clash between two different aesthetic as well as moral impulses. Martin is the hero endowed with both, and his wish to have some influence over Clesant's life is cut short before taking any practical form. After this failure to write a new novel, Forster did not publish another until 1924. In his final novel A Passage to India, Forster extends his interest to the

⁷¹ Forster, "Art for Art's Sake," Two Cheers for Democracy 87-93 at 92.

outside of Europe, and once again takes up the issue of the tourist gaze, but this time only to confirm its essential inability to attain what it has sought after.

Chapter 3

Adela Quested's Traumatic Experience in the Cave:

The Collapse of Ocularcentrism in A Passage to India

At the beginning of A Passage to India, the reader encounters Adela Quested's complaint about her stay in India, which is not unlike that of Lucy in A Room with a View: she feels over-protected by the circle of her countrymen and prevented from accessing the reality of India. Being a "logical girl" (PI 24), however, she articulates what she wants far more clearly than Lucy. At the Club in Chandrapore, "Miss Quested, who always said exactly what was in her mind, announced anew that she was desirous of seeing the real India" (PI 19-20); she also says, "I'm tired of seeing picturesque figures pass before me as a frieze" (PI 21). The word "frieze" shows that she is aware of the reductive nature of the colonizer's gaze, which has represented India as a picturesque spectacle, pleasant to the Western eye.¹ Continually disappointed by her pseudo-experience of India, Adela comes to see the Marabar Hills far in the distance as a symbol of the elusive country:

How lovely they suddenly were! But she couldn't touch them. In front, like a shutter, fell a vision of her married life. She and Ronny would look into the

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Trans-Culturation (London: Routledge, 1992); Laurence Kitzan, Victorian Writers and the Image of Empire: The Rose-Colored Vision (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 2001). Kitzan's book has chapters on "world pictures" but no direct reference to Heidegger. As for the concept of the "picturesque" originally spread in England in the late eighteenth century, I have consulted Malcolm Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800 (Aldershot: Scolar, 1989).

Club like this every evening, then drive home to dress; they would see the Lesleys and the Callendars and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite them and be invited by them, while the true India slid by unnoticed. Colour would remain—the pageant of birds in the early morning, brown bodies, white turbans, idols whose flesh was scarlet or blue—and movement would remain as long as there were crowds in the bazaar and bathers in the tanks. Perched up on the seat of a dogcart, she would see them. But the force that lies behind colour and movement would escape her even more effectually than it did now. She would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit, and she assumed that it was a spirit of which Mrs Moore had had a glimpse. (PI 38)

This passage is significant not only because it reveals Adela's personal anxiety about marriage, but also because it illuminates her desire for knowledge that is conceptualized and imagined in visual terms. What is consistent in her thoughts is the *dual* structure of the visual field and the conceptualization of knowledge. Her life as a British officer's wife would have an effect "like a shutter," forever hiding the real India from her eyes. On the surface she can still see color and movement, but they are as if a part of a pageant or representation on a frieze, and the real force or spirit behind still evades her recognition.

This imaginary twofoldedness of the visible—the flat surfaces of things and their hidden essence behind—has been regarded by scholars as contemporaneous and historically bound up with the invention of perspectivism in Renaissance painting.² The art of former periods does not have what we call today "depth." In the medieval period, time and space were conceptualized as static and discontinuous. The unifying principles of history were typological, and the past patterns of the Biblical anecdotes were expected to make repeated appearance in the arena provided by time. In this typological universe, things were thought to have particular,

² Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Realism and Consensus in the English Novel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 3-24.

irreducible attributes, and that is why each object we find in medieval art has discrete form and detail, which bears no relation to adjacent fields. This also means that, for medieval people, the assumption of a spectator standing outside and looking at the painting did not exist. It is the divine presence that looks upon the world, and the human being is the object of their straightforward, penetrating gaze. The third dimension is to be found not at the background of the image, but *in front of it*.³ In the Renaissance period, a complete transformation was brought about in such an understanding of time and space so that they came to be grasped as homogeneous, universally unchanging. Due to this new concept, it became possible to chart the differences and similarities in nature and from this starting point to derive general laws in both science and art. In the field of visual art, it took the form of the advent of perspectivism, which might be thought of as “the rationalization of sight.” The Renaissance painting presents objects in a way that they would appear when viewed from one or more points *outside* the picture, where an imaginary spectator is supposed to be standing. Instead of God, now it is man who is looking at the world; the painted divine figure no longer directs the gaze to us, but turns aside to be an object of our gaze. This is a universe with man at the centre, and in this sense, the “discovery” of perspective represents “*the viewpoint of the modern ego-subject*, whose will to power has finally appropriated visionary

³ For the difference in the representation of the divine figure and the direction of their gaze in the Byzantine and Renaissance painting, see Jean Paris, Painting and Linguistics (Pittsburg: Carnegie-Mellon UP, 1975).

being.”⁴ The cognitive dual structure that we find in Adela’s thoughts is complicit with this anthropocentric view of the world. The premise that objects in the visual field remain the same even though their appearance varies according to the applied viewpoint implies that they always have a hidden identity not available to direct perception, an interiority that cannot be grasped at the first or even second sight. The visible part is always an “aspect” of the object, while its essence has receded to an abstract realm of conceptualization that we call “depth,” a dimension which the painting does not actually possess. The Renaissance rationalization of sight thus turned the visual field into the system of signs. The will to knowledge and power simultaneously and paradoxically thrust an insurmountable gap between sight and knowledge as well as between subject and object: man is excluded from the world that he is looking at as a spectator standing outside.

With this awareness in mind, it is possible to see the modern tourist gaze under a new light. According to Strain’s definition that we looked at in the last chapter, the defining feature of the tourist gaze is the assumption that, behind one’s visual field, there lies something more authentic, and this expectation maintains the double structure of surface and depth. When we travel, we move in space, and theoretically speaking, this should enable us to go in depth, go behind things. However, as Heidegger’s “The Age of the World Picture” diagnoses as a determinate symptom of modernity, our modern system of knowledge, which originates in the

⁴ David Michael Levin, The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation (NY: Routledge, 1988) 115. For this part on perspectivism, I have looked at 110-16.

Renaissance, has codified the world as a flat, uniform picture; what one sees is always a representation of the world understood by already known laws and rules, of which perspectivism is one. In this world, then, what remains as depth? Fredric Jameson in “Modernism and Imperialism” shows how far the venture of imperialism has created a “void” in the colonizer’s perceptual system: it not only appears as a blank part on the map, like that which famously sets Marlow on his voyage to the Congo in Heart of Darkness, but also permeates the heart of national, domestic life.⁵ Jameson particularly takes up Howards End as an appropriate text to demonstrate this. The word “Infinity” repeated in the novel signifies the space left unmapped in England’s cognitive landscape: the awareness that a significant structure of the economic system lies elsewhere and remains invisible, makes the life and experience in the metropolis incomplete in meaning and creates a void in linguistic habits. Imperialism thus creates “a global space that like the fourth dimension somehow constitutively escapes you.”⁶ In his last novel, Forster turns his tourist gaze to the East, and sees India as a space escaping the epistemological cartography of the West. In consequence, Adela’s desire to see the real India causes confusion and disaster among the Anglo-Indians and this takes the particular form of sight’s failure to work as a source of knowledge. In the following discussion, I would like to focus on this aspect of the novel, which has not been fully

⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Modernism and Imperialism,” Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward W. Said, Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 43-68.

⁶ Jameson 51. The use of the concept, “the fourth dimension,” will be examined in the section 3.2.

explored in existing criticism whose emphasis falls more on the effect of the infamous echo.

3.1. The Failed Witness in the Eyeless Cave

Even before their actual visit to the caves, it is suggested that the Marabar somehow resists the impulse to describe it. Though it is said at the very beginning that the city of Chandrapore has nothing extraordinary *except* the caves, nobody, including the narrator, goes on to explain how extraordinary they are. After the failure of Turton's bridge party, Adela meets Aziz and Professor Godbole—a Brahman said to be profoundly knowledgeable—at Fielding's private tea party, and eagerly enquires about the caves: "Do describe them, Professor Godbole" (PI 63). But he returns a pointless answer: they are not large, unlike the caves at the Elephanta, not holy, not ornamented, but their reputation is not an empty boast either (PI 63-64). Against Adela's wish to hear them "described," not only Godbole but the text itself strategically avoids doing so with the frequent use of negation such as "no," "not," and "nothing."⁷

On the day of their fatal expedition, Adela brings Ronny's field-glasses with her as if she were once again announcing her wish to *see*. While the party is going up to the hills from the nearby station, a small but curious incident happens to augur the difficulties that she will face. Adela

⁷ As for the novel's use of negation as a narrative technique, see Gillian Beer, "Negation in *A Passage to India*," *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 30 (1980) 151-66.

recognizes a thin, black object in the distance with her naked eye and cries “A snake!” The villagers agree and Aziz quickly forges a story of a venomous cobra. Seen with the field-glasses, however, it turns out to be a withered stump; so Adela says that it is not a snake. This time no one agrees since she has already put the word “snake” into their minds, and they refuse to abandon it. Aziz borrows her glasses and admits that it looks like a tree, but still insists that it is really a cobra in protective mimicry (PI 125). Here the field-glasses, one of the major Western inventions within the terms of its empirical belief in scientific accuracy, has silently but irrevocably lost its authority: even through its lenses, an old stump can be a cobra if one’s mood chooses, and there is no ultimate way to tell what it really is. Also, the narrator is careful enough to eliminate the possibility that this inexplicability has a seed of romantic experience: “Nothing was explained, and yet there was no romance” (PI 125). Deliberately, he draws a line between the Romantic ineffable and the unexplained things in India by introducing some key terms of Romanticism. Adela has expected now that she is in India and is engaged to be married, that the double event should make “every instant *sublime*” (PI 118, emphasis added), but it does not. Also, disappointed by the Indian sunrise seen from the train window, Adela and Mrs. Moore look back at their stay at Grasmere: “Ah, the dearest Grasmere!’ . . . Romantic yet manageable, it sprang from a kindlier planet” (PI 122). As they come nearer the Marabar, their inability to “manage” gradually spreads over “a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that is

to say, sounds did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion" (PI 124). When we look at things, we usually do so with the preliminary knowledge of the familiar and similar. But the sight stretching in front of Adela and Mrs. Moore now is unlike anything that they have seen so far. They have to see without any "roots" in their mind, and the landscape begins to appear like an illusion, which has no ground in reality (of their Western version of reality). The trip to the Marabar thus paves the way to the climactic moment in the caves, which marks the ultimate collapse of the Western ontology of vision.

It is not Adela but Mrs. Moore who first goes through a spiritual crisis during the excursion. Her ordeal may be seen as a breakdown of her Christian philanthropic mind by the echo which annuls the meaning of Logos, but it is also important to examine the experience in relation to the malfunction of her sight. In the first cave, Mrs. Moore has nearly fainted in darkness:

Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz and Adela in the dark, didn't know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing stuck to her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo. (PI 130)

It must be emphasized that, when her vision stops working properly, a fear of the Indians is awakened in her, to which, so far, she has been one of the least susceptible among the British characters. Now she cannot see; instead her other senses grow acute and she becomes physically conscious of the people surrounding her. What is remarkable about this scene is that

it subtly evokes all of her five senses *except* the ocular: the chamber starts to smell, the Indian bodies touch her, and she hears the ominous echo. The taste may seem missing, but even this is remotely referred to by a naked thing stuck on her mouth (though it also suggests the silencing effect of the cave). That all of these sensations drive her “mad” reveals that even Mrs. Moore has internalized the imperial gaze, which works as a sort of protective shield against the Other in normal situations.⁸ A little later, watching people coming out from the cave, she realizes that there was nothing evil inside. She was “among the mildest individuals, whose only desire was to honour her, and the naked pad was a poor little baby, astride its mother’s hip” (PI 131). When distance and light are not admitted, the mildest individuals may turn into a menace: even an innocent baby can be “some vile naked thing”: the direct contact with the anonymous, indigenous body disgusted her. It is imaginable that even though this feeling lasted only for a moment under an unusual circumstance, it is a serious blow for Mrs. Moore, who previously admonished her son that the English should be pleasant to Indian people since India is a part of God’s creation (PI 42). It is when her sight fails that her belief in Christian philanthropy betrayed its limit.⁹ It may be also significant that the match struck in this first cave

⁸ As for this aspect of the imperial gaze, see E. Ann Kaplan, Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze (London: Routledge, 1997). In this study Kaplan points out that the power structure of the “male gaze,” which was widely discussed in white feminist film theories in the 1970-80s, and the colonizer’s “imperial gaze” share the same basic structure: both are privileged way of seeing to secure the male/colonizer’s superiority over the female/colonized respectively; at the bottom of the formation of this gaze, there is a fear to lose one’s identity in the face of the Other. Although it is Hollywood films that Kaplan looks at, her theory clearly has validity when we think about the imperial gaze in other media including literature. Strain’s point about the tourist gaze’s effect of exoticizing and fetishizing the object is also relevant here. See Strain 17-18.

⁹ Another cause of her terror in relation to her religion may be that Mrs. Moore is made

does not impress Mrs. Moore; on the contrary, it seems to be completely obliterated from her memory. Asked by Adela if she saw the beautiful reflection of the light, Mrs. Moore returns a tentative answer, "I forget . . . " (PI 131). Rather than seeing anything, she did hear the echo: "Even the striking of a match starts [echoes like] a little worm coiling, which is too small to complete a circle, but is eternally watchful" (PI 131). Here "the light in darkness" fails to function as a traditional metaphor of intellect triumphant over ignorance; instead, it produces echoes like a writhing worm, which is assumed to have no intellect.¹⁰ Drawing on an analogy between the monotonous echo and the imbecile worm, the text indicates a force that is hidden but always there, threatening to destroy the meanings of human activities. In the cave, it is not the human intellect but this worm that is "eternally watchful."

The nature of Adela's experience that follows has always been central for the interpretation of the novel. Although there are a variety of attempts to define it, they seem to have reached a consensus that it stands for Adela's encounter with something unintelligible to her logical mind, be it her suppressed sexual desire, her gendered body, or the subconscious womb of the Indian earth.¹¹ In this view, one critic is right in focusing on the

aware of her own body through the awakening of the four other senses. Hitting and gasping within a crowd, she faces her own body, which Christianity teaches her not exactly to ignore, but always to place lower than the mind.

¹⁰ For more about the use of light and darkness as the metaphor of intellect and ignorance in the Enlightenment, see Jay 83-148. Note that here the narrative is even more pessimistic about sight's ability to attain knowledge, compared to the scene from The Longest Journey cited in the introduction.

¹¹ Summarizing various interpretations of Adela's experience, V. A. Shahane cites as "a minority critical view" that "Adela is sexually charmed by Aziz and that in her subconscious self she desires to be raped by him." E. M. Forster, "A Passage to India": A Study (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1977) 31. But the reading of Adela's experience in terms of

field-glasses as a symbol of Adela's shallow rationalism, which is to be shattered in the cave.¹² Just before Adela enters it, her mind is rather split: she is "thinking with half her mind 'Sight-seeing bores me' and wondering with the other half about marriage" (PI 136). In the cave, both her desire to know the real India and her logical thoughts about love and marriage are challenged; and significantly, it is by the forsaken field-glasses that her ordeal is implied, for we are not to see her until many chapters later. Her fundamentally Western approach to knowledge exposes its limit in the form of a broken optical device that suggests the malfunction of her sight in the cave. What is remarkable about the statement that she composes later for the trial is that she did not actually see Aziz's face there. She entered one cave and scratched the wall with her fingernail to start the echo; presently Aziz followed her into the

sexual repression, hysteria, or fear of the body is by no means a minor view—largely speaking, the interpretations that associate Adela's crisis with the failure to recognize the importance of passion and instincts (revealed with the aids of Freudian and Jungian theories of psychoanalysis) can be categorized into this group. Perhaps Wilfred Stone's is typical of this reading. Stone sees the Marabar as the metaphor of the all-including womb of the Mother earth, in which Adela encounters what Jung calls "the Shadow," the deepest bottom of the unconsciousness. See Stone 298-346. However, John Beer criticizes the psychoanalytic reading of the novel like Stone's, for the author himself refuses to give any meaning to the cave, and to read it as a metaphor goes against his refusal. In this line of argument, Beer discusses the novel's representation of the cave as similar to the French *nouveau roman* with its total denial of meaning. See his "A Passage to India, the French New Novel and English Romanticism," ed. John Beer, A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1985) 104-31, especially at 115-16 for Beer's critique of Stone's reading. Feminist critics, on the other hand, have attempted to decode the "suppression" itself as a construct of male colonial discourse and Adela's difficulty as the result. For the examples of this type of interpretation, see Brenda R. Silver, "Periphrasis, Power, and Rape in A Passage to India," Tambling 171-94, and Nancy L. Paxton, Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1999). Paxton's study is a broad analysis of the representation of rape in English literature, and in her view A Passage to India shows a collision between the male colonial discourse that suppresses rape as unspeakable and Adela's potential sexual openness informed by contemporary Freudian theory. See 229-66.

¹² Ted E. Boyle, "Adela Quested's Delusion: The Failure of Rationalism in A Passage to India," College English 26 (1965) 478-80.

cave—"there was this shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up"; she hit him with the glasses, and he pulled her round by the strap until it broke and she escaped (PI 171). It is some shadowy presence that threatened her, and she thought that it was Aziz, whose thoughts were misled by their conversation about love and marriage just a moment ago. As the only witness of the event, she did not see the crucial thing—the criminal's face.

In addition to this "blank point" in Adela's visual perception, it is also important to note that Forster himself denies any knowledge about what happens to her, and with this negation, distances himself from the traditional role of the author. Against his friend Galsworthy Lowes Dickinson's objection to the mystery of the scene, in his oft-cited letter Forster replies:

In the cave it is *either* a man, or the supernatural, *or* an illusion. And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a blur here—i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts in daily life. This isn't a philosophy of aesthetics. It's a peculiar trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was India. It sprang straight from my subject matter. I wouldn't have attempted it in other countries, which though they contain mysteries or muddles, manage to draw rings round them.¹³

Here the author himself admits a lack of knowledge, a "blur," in his mind.¹⁴ Consequently, there is a curious leap in the narrative: chapter

¹³ P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*, Vol.2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978) 125.

¹⁴ About this point, Benita Parry and Penelope Pether put forward completely different views: Parry thinks that the evasions in the novel's articulations of imperialist ideology puts the text at the extreme verge of colonial literature and that it presents a set of alternative to an imperialist civilization ("The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*," Tambling 133-50). In contrast, Pether argues that the elusiveness of the novel is an outcome of the authorial, not just narrational, anxiety about the nature of "Englishness" against colonial "Anglo-Indianess," rather than its faithfulness to the Indian Other ("*A Passage to India*: A Passage to Patria?," Tambling 195-212). In my view, these two readings are not so antagonistic as they appear to be: the void in narrative, which centers around the caves, is a product of Forster's intention of *not* representing India as well as of the epistemological limit to his representation of it. In short, I would like to say, the two

fifteen ends with Adela's split mind before going into the cave, and the next chapter begins with the figure of Aziz trying to recover from the shock of Adela's insensitive question—how many wives he has—in “his” cave (PI 136). This possessive mildly suggests that this is not the one which contains Adela, but there is no knowing the truth since *no eye* follows her into the cave. Neither any character (including Adela herself) nor the narrator is given the privilege of observation in this critical scene, and the forsaken field-glasses signify this temporary but complete removal of sight from the text. The cave is presented as a completely *eyeless* space.

One might reasonably think that the last sentence from the letter, “in other countries . . . [I would] manage to draw rings around them,” is a reminder of two objects in The Longest Journey. One is Stewart Ansell's drawing, a visual expression of his philosophy: a circle within a square, within the circle a square, and inside that another circle, and inside that another square—this continues until there is no more space. To Rickie's question if they are real, Ansell answers: “The inside one is—the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw” (LJ 17). Ansell tries to distinguish things that have an objective reality from “the subjective product of a diseased imagination” (LJ 17). Here the use of visual patterns is curious in terms of their connection to the concept of the real. Though the circles and squares themselves are not to be recognized as the real, they work as a sort of conduit to objective reality, which is thought to be barely visible in itself. Later this motif of “rings” appears as the

readings are two sides of the same coin.

Cadbury Rings, a natural landscape made of round embankments and a tree at the centre. Rickie and his aunt are walking across the rings, and when they reach the tree, she tells him that Stephen is his half-brother (LJ 125-31). Once again Forster effectively uses the visual motif to convey the intensifying process of approaching the hidden truth. In both cases, these images are not important in themselves but as an *indicator* of the real at the centre; it is assumed that the real can be enclosed with the visible rings. As a result, they generate the verbal description and keep the narrative going.

In comparison with this aesthetic strategy in The Longest Journey, the “blur” in A Passage to India has a fundamentally different nature. Forster’s previous works are actually full of rings, circles, containers, to protect what is valued most from the outside world.¹⁵ To give just a few more examples, there is a hollow tree in “The Road from Colonus”; Rickie’s dell in Cambridge; the room and the pool in A Room with A View; the house in Howards End. Their materiality is important not in itself but because of its ability to include and exclude: while it puts valuable things and people under its protection, those unworthy of it are not permitted entrance and are left outside. A Passage to India is a novel far more self-conscious than his earlier works about the artificiality of such an aesthetic device, an enclosure made of words. As the brief episode of Mr. Grayford and Mr. Sorley the missionaries shows, something must be excluded from a place or gathering in order to maintain its meaning. Otherwise, “we shall be left

¹⁵ This aspect of Forsterian literature is pointed out by Stone. See Stone 298.

with nothing” (PI 30).

If the Marabar caves contain anything, it is this “nothingness”: born before anything else in the world, “[n]othing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech” (PI 110). As they were sealed up before humanity arrived and started to distinguish things, even if they are excavated, “nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil” (PI 111). With this cognitive and linguistic void at the centre, in this last novel of Forster, the visible ring is replaced by another type of ring—the echo, the invisible ring that haunts both Mrs. Moore and Adela after the expedition. It is compared to an imaginary little worm “too small to complete a circle,” and if several people talk at once, “echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently” (PI 131). There is either an imperfect ring to imply the absence of the center, the real, or, there are too many separate rings with nothing to synthesize them into a unity. This echo is, to borrow Forster’s words, not “a philosophy of aesthetics” to achieve some effect and meaning, but a peculiar trick to weave into the text the cognitive “blur,” which is essentially not subject to visualization and articulation.

The broken field-glasses, therefore, it can be argued, signify not only Adela’s failed rationalism but also the author’s gesture of discarding the aesthetics of the ring, the will to visualize, in the face of the Other. When Aziz finds them at the entrance of one cave, the leather strap is broken, so he puts them into his pocket instead (PI 138). Later we are told that not

only the strap, but “the eye-piece was jammed” (PI 148). In short, it is irrevocably destroyed: even if the strap is renewed, it cannot be put to use any more as the life of the device, the lens, is broken. The word “jammed”—neither “crushed” nor “broken”—hints at the implication that it was damaged as a result of the confrontation with something outside, the East as the Other, and its function of seeing is now “blocked up.” The irony is that the authorities seize the field-glasses as evidence of Aziz’s attempted insult. Broadly speaking, it is the Western cognitive system that is violated in the cave, and Aziz is arrested (to compensate this permanent loss) as a representative of the Oriental. If the Marabar is—to borrow Sara Suleri Goodyear’s memorable expression—“the anus of imperialism” from where things indigestible for the colonizer are excreted,¹⁶ the broken field-glasses, the only thing left behind after the ordeal of Mrs. Moore and Adela, marks the point of departure from Western “logocentricism” in Forster’s fictional world.¹⁷

Interestingly, when Adela reappears in the narrative, she is entirely subject to the investigation by another optical device, as if to cover the loss of the field-glasses. Hundreds of cactus spines stuck to her when she was running down the Marabar Hill at the sight of Miss Derek’s car, and now two ladies are laboring to pick them up from her skin:

Hour after hour Miss Derek and Mrs McBryde examined her through magnifying glasses, always coming on fresh colonies, tiny hairs that might snap off and be drawn into the blood if they were neglected. She lay passive

¹⁶ Sara Suleri Goodyear, “Forster’s Imperial Erotic,” *Tambling* 151-70 at 151.

¹⁷ I have taken the word “logocentricism” from “phallogocentricism,” the term Jay uses in relation of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray’s critique of ocularcentrism. As my emphasis here falls more on the problem of visualization and articulation rather than the issue of gender, I have omitted the phallus. See Martin 493-542.

beneath their fingers, which developed the shock that had begun in the cave. Hitherto she had not much minded whether she was touched or not; her senses were abnormally inert, and the only contact she anticipated was that of the mind. Everything now was transferred to the surface of her body, which began to avenge itself, and feed unhealthily. (PI 171)

In parallel to things taking place in the male-dominant, public sphere—the official investigation of the case and the efforts by Aziz’s friends to clear his name—Adela’s countrywomen are desperately searching the cause of pain afflicting her flesh. Since the collapse of her ocularcentric intellectualism, Adela has become keenly aware of her body, the neglected half of her being; in this fate of Adela, we find a clear example of the Cartesian idea of the eye in its mind/body dualism. The two women, who were also brought up in the same tradition which locates the body as ideally entirely under the control of mind, try to combat this with a prosthetically enhanced sight (the magnifying glasses) before the promptings of the body subvert the apparent stability at the heart of the Western epistemological system. Once damaged, however, the authority of the system cannot be fully restored: when the pain subsides, Adela starts hearing the echo, another form of physical affliction, which is again impossible to describe verbally.

It is here that trauma studies, which have been animated since the 1980s, seem to offer us a new insight if we take the echo that starts to haunt Adela after the first shock as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although medical professionals have not yet arrived at a precise definition of PTSD, it is generally agreed that a devastating event or events are followed by a (sometimes delayed) response, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with “numbing” that may have begun

during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.¹⁸ This explanation seems appropriately to describe Adela's state after the expedition. She is virtually "possessed" by the echo, and finds it difficult to continue her normal life: "the echo flourished, raging up and down like a nerve in the faculty of her hearing, and the noise in the cave, so unimportant intellectually, was prolonged over the surface of her life" (PI 172). She tries to "think the incident out" logically as she always does with other things, but each time she is disturbed by the echo and falls into emotional hysteria, which is more degrading for her than the event in the cave itself. The monosyllabic sound haunts her due to its elusive, non-verbal nature: "There was 'the shock', but what is that? For a time her own logic would convince her, then she would hear the echo again, weep, declare she was unworthy of Ronny" (PI 172). Cathy Caruth argues that the very elusiveness of PTSD testifies to the unique ontology of trauma—that is, it cannot be defined by the event itself, which may or may not be catastrophic and traumatize everyone equally, nor can it be defined in terms of the distortion of the event, which achieves haunting power as a result of personal significances attached to it. Rather, the pathology of trauma should be interpreted solely by the structure of its experience: when it is actually taking place, the event is not experienced fully because of its overwhelming nature, but assimilated only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one

¹⁸ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1995) 4-5. Here Caruth follows the definition of PTSD set by American Psychiatric Association in 1980.

who went through it.¹⁹ Therefore,

To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished.²⁰

Trauma in this light stands as the biggest challenge to Freudian psychoanalysis: it does not maintain the assumption of the “truth” located in the event itself, but exists as a hole or void, the collapse of understanding in the face of the *otherness* of the event. This explains the “surprising literality,” the non-symbolic nature, of traumatic dreams or flashbacks.²¹ With these characteristic features of trauma in mind, to see the echo as Adela’s PTSD not only makes the view that she faces her repressed sexual desire in the cave look rather simplistic, but lightens up the radical strategy of A Passage to India more—its determination *not* to represent and *not* to give any meaning to India at the crux of the novel.

According to Caruth, another specific quality that inhabits all traumatic experience is the inability to witness the event fully as it occurs, or, to put it in a different way, the ability to witness the event fully only at

¹⁹ This aspect of traumatic experience is best explained in Caruth’s volume in the article co-written by Bessel O. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart in terms of the function of the brain: during the incident, only the sensation sector of the brain (the amygdala) is active while the meaning-making part called the cerebral cortex remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively. See Caruth 158-82. Against this model of dissociation on which Caruth’s argument is centered, in her recent book on trauma, E. Ann Kaplan warns that it is not the only valid structure of trauma: there are at least two other possible models which involve cognition and unconscious processes that are excluded in Caruth’s definition. See E. Ann Kaplan, Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2005) 32-39. However, it seems to me that, among these three, Caruth’s model provides a reading most faithful to the unintelligible nature of Adela’s experience, and therefore in this chapter I am using the word “trauma” according to Caruth’s definition.

²⁰ Caruth 5.

²¹ Caruth 5.

the cost of witnessing oneself.²² A vision of the event often arrives later, and even then, it cannot be a complete, intelligible vision; if complete, it is no longer faithful to the uncontrollable nature of the event. In the case of Mrs. Moore, this takes the form of “the twilight of the double vision” that arrives later, in which “the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time” (PI 184). What is most alarming about this state is that she cannot decide her attitude—though two views are contradictory to each other, there is no way to tell which is “truer,” and this causes her to sink into profound resignation. This indeterminacy evacuates all the meaning from the world that she lives in, and eventually Mrs. Moore dies on the sea.

Nonetheless, it is also this “double vision” that comes to have a positive effect on Adela on the day of the trial. At the court, Indian people hear the name of Mrs. Moore, who they believe was forced to go back since she would testify to Aziz’s innocence, and they start chanting her Indianized name, “Esmiss Esmoore.” This strange sound suddenly stops the echo in Adela’s ears and sets her to think about the incident lucidly. Feeling a new and unknown strength inside her, Adela in the witness box looks back to the Marabar in her mind: “The fatal day recurred, in every detail, but now she was of it and not of it at the same time, and this double relation gave it indescribable splendour” (PI 202). This temporal and geographical gap between the event and the understanding of it infallibly

²² Caruth 7. A more recent study on trauma explains this relationship between the event and the witness by referring to Jacques Derrida’s “logic of supplement.” See Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, eds., Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma (Routledge: NY, 2003) 36.

characterizes traumatic experience: since it is not understood while it is taking place, “it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time.”²³ Here Adela’s two points of view, one is of the past and there, and the other the present and here, coincide without cancelling each other or being antagonistic. When she goes on to examine the crucial scene, it is in this “double relation” that she finds the “truth” about the incident:

Her vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in. She failed to locate him. It was the doubt that had often visited her, but solid and attractive, like the hills. ‘I am not—’ Speech was more difficult than vision. ‘I am not quite sure.’ . . . ‘Dr Aziz never followed me into the cave.’ (PI 203)

In order to approach the truth, this peculiar state of her being simultaneously inside and outside the cave is imperative. On the one hand, if she entirely devotes herself to the original incident, there will be no understanding but the ominous echo resounding. On the other hand, if she merely looks back at the event as an outsider, the knowledge gained in the process would not be truthful to her own experience. Only in this double relation, traumatic experience can be told, witnessed. In this case, the truth arrives only in the negative form: Aziz did not follow her into the cave. It is *what did not happen* that is revealed, while what really happened there perpetually remains as an epistemological void.²⁴

If, as Jameson argues, Howards End captures the cognitive blur that imperialism has created in the heart of the European metropolis, A Passage to India registers it at the furthest point from home, as the

²³ Caruth 8.

²⁴ It may be added here that there is even a possibility that nothing happened at all in the cave and Adela herself broke the field-glasses in a state of derangement.

ultimate failure of the tourist gaze that the West turns on the Orient. Adela's desire to see "real" India ends up in a falling apart of her rational being, which accompanies the suspension of her sight and the subsequent experience of the echoes. It is precisely in this sense that her experience has more than a personal signification: as Caruth says, "[t]he traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."²⁵ To witness a traumatic event is always a cultural and intellectual phenomenon,²⁶ and Adela's experience in the cave stands as one witness to the history of the British Empire. In what follows, I am going to discuss this trauma in a wider context of modernist epistemological anxiety and see how the text struggles with the "impossible history" on the level of representation.

3.2. What Lies Beyond the Horizon?: The Modernist Epistemic Trauma

One of the keynotes of modernism is its "epistemic trauma," the conscious refusal by artist and thinkers to give their audience the traditional spatial and temporal orientation that art and literature had provided since the Renaissance and culminating in mid-nineteenth century.²⁷ In painting, this "trauma" appears as a realization that the

²⁵ Caruth 5.

²⁶ Douglass and Vogler 1. This study offers many insightful suggestions about trauma, which are essentially compatible with Caruth's ideas but in part more updated. One of them is its full-awareness that trauma theory has developed into a "discourse."

²⁷ As for the concept of modernism's epistemic trauma, see Thomas Vargish and Delos E. Mook, Inside Modernism: Relativity Theory, Cubism, Narrative (New Haven: Yale UP,

Renaissance linear perspective is not an objective truth but a cultural construction, a consensus.²⁸ In the works of late nineteenth century French artists, most notably Paul Cézanne, we see this consensus start to give way.²⁹ For example, although the works of Edgar Degas generally do not strike the viewer with marked novelty, his Le Tub (1886) requires more than one point of view to be seen as it is; Cézanne's Nature morte au panier (1888-90), more explicitly, needs at least three different points of view. This breaking of the laws of single-point perspective reaches an apogee in Cubist paintings. Pablo Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O) (1907) radically violates both the classical norms of the human figure and the spatial illusionism of one-point perspective. The multi-facets of Cubist painting suggest that reality has many other faces than the one presented by traditional perspectivism. On the other hand, modernist literature puts into question the notion of Newtonian linear time. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth draws an extensive analogy between them, the single point of view in realist painting and the narrator in realist fiction rely on the same basic agreement that space and time are universally homogeneous. Like the implied spectator standing outside the picture, the narrator "stands outside the frame of events but in the same continuum, that is to say in a

1999) 14-50. This study sees Einstein's Relativity Theory, which changed the concept of Newtonian objective, uniform time and space, as manifestations and expressions of a revolution in thought and feeling in Western culture broadly called modernism, and it discusses Cubist painting and modernist literature from this point of view. I think that this book's use of the term "trauma" can be linked to Caruth's study as her theory too foregrounds the idea of an initial shock, which brings about the difficulty in continuing to operate the existent cognitive system as before, and the aftermath of this failure.

²⁸ Vargish and Delos openly admit their debt to Ermarth's study and dedicate their book to her.

²⁹ The following description of a change in the painting is taken from Vargish and Delos 31-34.

time by convention coextensive with that of the represented time.”³⁰ This temporal consensus allows the reader to accept everything in narrative as related, and in this all-related universe, each item (whether it is an event or a character’s aspect) seen from a diverse points of view is assured to have meaning in the whole system of signs. It is this rationalization of consciousness that helps the reader always find ethical meanings in realist fiction. According to Ermarth, the author who first shows a departure from this consensus in the late nineteenth century is Henry James.³¹ Compared with his contemporaries Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy, James was still writing within the tradition of realism, but he strains it to breaking point. In his novels, the viewpoints taken by different characters collide and the tension is scarcely resolved. There is no narrator standing outside to synthesize them, but the central perspective is situated within the picture and taken over by the main character, whose consciousness we follow closely.³² The disappearance of the objective narrator and the multiple viewpoints without synthesis—these are both further developed in later modernist fiction.³³

It can be argued that Adela’s double vision in the trial scene is the germ of the multiple points of view in Forster’s fiction—it is an outcome of modernist epistemic trauma, to which the British colonial enterprise

³⁰ Ermarth 40.

³¹ The following part on James is taken from Ermarth 257-73.

³² This is relevant to my argument in the first chapter on The Ambassadors and Strether’s point of view as dominant.

³³ I am going to analyze this point more in detail in chapter five by taking up Woolf’s To the Lighthouse as an appropriate example. In The Waves too, as long as Percival—the much-admired common friend of the six main characters—is alive, he works as the centre of the novel’s design, but his death brings about the centerless universe in which they float without firm contours of individualized personality.

contributed no less than did any other modern phenomenon. Seeing the event in this light, one may notice that Adela's vision at the court is not the first one, but, in fact, the novel is full of indications of multiple viewpoints from the beginning. In the opening chapter, the reader may be surprised at the brusque and impersonal description of Chandrapore. It begins with a negation, "Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary" (PI 3). Here the Ganges happens not to be holy, and the squalid streets, houses, and inhabitants are scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish deposited freely by the river: "Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life" (PI 3). After reading this amoeba-like, abject feature of Chandrapore, we are invited to see a very different view of the city. From the Civil Station high upon the hill, it looks like a totally different place. It is a city of gardens, or rather, it is not a city but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. The tropical trees that were hidden behind the bazaars are now visible and in their turn hide the sordid bazaars. The trees are growing to become a city for the birds, and "glorify the city to the English people who inhabit the rise, so that newcomers cannot believe it to be as meagre as it is described, and have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment" (PI 4). The two points of view, one from a lower angle and the other from a higher, offer two entirely dissimilar pictures of the same Chandrapore; and this augurs the difficulties that characters are to face in the rest of the novel due to the difference in their

nationality and background. Before the first chapter comes to an end, there is one more perspective introduced: the narrator refers to the sky overarching both the bazaars and the Civil Station. The depiction of the sky carries the nature that extends the reader's imagination to an extreme point: "The distance between the earth and them [the stars] is as nothing to the distance behind them; and that further distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue." Thus making one think of the realm stretching beyond one's perception, the narrator rather dramatically announces that "[t]he sky settles everything" on the earth, "because it is so strong and so enormous" (PI 4). In this way, only in the first chapter, the narrative point of view is already shifting quickly from one to another, from the lowest to the highest, and reminds one that the same place looks different according to the viewpoint adopted. In the following chapter, we come across the lively description of Aziz abandoning his bicycle and striding into his uncle's house; from this scene onwards, the main characters make their appearances one by one, and the story starts to develop as in a normal realist novel. However, the impersonal shifting viewpoints introduced in the first chapter repeatedly appear here and there in the text and achieves the effect of diminishing the human drama.

This impression intensifies when Adela and Fielding have their final conversation before her departure from India. Both of them are "at the height of their powers"—their intellectual rationalism is brought into full play, and they reach the same, hopeful, opinion about life after the fuss over the trial. At the same time, however, they are conscious of something

that diminishes their achievement: it is “as though they had seen their own gestures from an immense height—dwarfs talking, shaking hands and assuring each other that they stood on the same footing of insight” (PI 234). Here we find the multiple viewpoints finally incorporated into the character’s mind. Their mind is, as Adela’s was at the court, split into two different views about life and the world: one is aware of their utmost ability as Western rational beings, but the other knows that it is not everything and that the East includes something beyond the reach of their cognition. Therefore, while they are talking, their mind’s eye sees themselves as small, dwarfish figures as if seen “from an immense height.” Also, interestingly, just before they have this “double vision,” they talk about the limit of their ken, and there *the wall of the cave* is given a metaphoric role of the threshold. Asked by Fielding who she thinks really followed her into the cave, she says: “It will never be known. It’s as if I ran my finger along that polished wall in the dark, and cannot get further. I am up against something, and so are you” (PI 233). This image of Adela touching the wall appears earlier, too: lying on the bed in the McBrydes’ bungalow, she rehearses how she would explain the disaster and remembers that she scratched the wall with her fingernail to start “the usual echo.” As soon as the echo started, she saw the shadow, which she took as Aziz, and all that followed are unspeakable (PI 171). The inner wall of the cave thus seems to stand for the limit of Adela’s understanding, and it may be also significant that it accompanies the loss of sight and the sense of touch to replace it.

One of the points that should not be missed about modernism’s

epistemic trauma is that it does not entirely abandon the concept of objectivity and the hope for presenting reality. What it refuses to do is not to acknowledge the existence of the “real” altogether, but to regard the basic consensus of realism as an absolute truth: instead, it tries to capture the modern phenomena which elude the existing method of measurement and representation. In this sense, modernism retains a key element of realism, the aspiration of presenting an objective picture of reality, and this coincides with its impulse to get outside the current system of knowledge. Among its various symptoms, the concept of “the fourth dimension” may be worth being taken up here in relation to the epistemological function given to the cave’s wall in A Passage to India.³⁴ The possibility of another dimension was widely recognized and discussed from the late nineteenth century onwards, with the growing interests in non-Euclidean geometry. Because of the very difficulty of proving its existence, the fourth dimension thrilled the contemporary imagination and was eagerly explored as a metaphor for almost anything from an ideal Platonic reality to Kantian thing-in-itself, which could lead one to the objective truth of the world. It was sometimes used as a method of social criticism in popular fiction such as E. A. Abott’s Flatland (1884) and H. G. Wells’s The Time Machine (1895); by contemplating another dimension, these works effectively criticize social issues of the age.³⁵ The concept has a strong influence on Cubist painters,

³⁴ It is interesting to note that, in the part cited above, Jameson also applies this term to the cognitive void imperialism has created: it is “a global space that like the fourth dimension somehow constitutively escapes you.”

³⁵ For the advent of non-Euclidean geometry and concept of n -dimension, as well as the process of their popularization, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 3-43. This

too. They willingly associated their practice with the fourth dimension, which had been so familiarized as to be “almost a household word by 1910,”³⁶ since what they were looking for—a higher perspective that leads us outside perspectivism and from which it would be possible to see reality in its wholeness—was conceptually very similar to it. The characteristic multiple-facets of the Cubist painting is the technique invented to arouse the sense of moving around the object, to incorporate time into space, and by doing so, to suggest a higher realm.³⁷

Between these efforts to provoke the fourth dimension and Forster’s use of the cave’s wall in A Passage to India, a curious link is found: they share the urge to call forth what is not present, a space created only in the mind. In order to examine this point clearly, now we turn to the beginning of the second part of the book, “Caves.” First it is marked with its impersonal account of Indian geography, but when it comes to the description of the cave’s innermost wall, the tone of narrative changes quite dramatically:

They are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit; the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished. The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and gray interpose, exquisite nebulae, shading fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible. Fists and fingers thrust above the advancing

study shows that non-Euclidean geometry and n -dimensional geometry are two separate geometries, which can be combined but are never necessarily so. However, in the end it is the latter that acquired far more popularity than the former, and they became to be seen inseparably connected.

³⁶ Henderson 43.

³⁷ See Henderson 44-100 for a detailed discussion about how the concept of the fourth dimension came to be linked to the Cubist practice by the theorists.

soil—here at last is their skin, finer than any covering acquired by the animals, smoother than windless water, more voluptuous than love. The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves. (PI 110-11)

Here, and here only, *the beauty of the Marabar is praised*, and as far as I know, very few critics have ever written on this paragraph, most probably because the overload of elaborate metaphors and romantic imagery puzzles them.³⁸ Although in reality there can be nothing but the stone there, by using the imagery of two flames approaching, this unusual passage subtly creates the illusion that beyond the wall there is another universe like the fourth dimension, where the unknown truth may be discovered.

In addition to the use of multiple viewpoints, the invocation of such a transcendental realm can be regarded as another indication of the novel's search for a new ontology of vision. In The Opening of Vision, David Michael Levin draws our attention to the notion of "horizon" in philosophy, which is conceptualized as a possible salvation from the narcissism of the Cartesian perceptual system. It is characteristic of the Cartesian model of the eye that it completely ignores the presence of the invisible field that

³⁸ One exception is found in John Beer's article, "A Passage to India, the French New Novel, and English Romanticism." Beer features the scene of two flames as one indication of positive value in the caves which is not checked or negated anywhere else, though he also admits that the effect is carefully restricted by the end of the paragraph:

The final emphasis, as so often in this novel, is upon limitation. The flames can never unite; the power of physical surface intervenes; light is surrounded by, and yields to, darkness. Yet that need not close the reader's eyes to what has opened out in the course of the paragraph. It is only under the rules of time which govern sequential fiction that the darkness triumphs; in another sense the beauty, inherent in the very rock itself, has opened another dimension. It has intimated the possible existence of a timeless order which might have an eternal value, and so gestured towards an absolute romanticism. (121, emphasis added)

This reading of Beer is very similar to mine in that it conceptualizes the possibility of new knowledge opening up beyond the physical surface of the wall, and it is interesting that Beer uses the term "another dimension," about which I will discuss shortly.

stretches beyond its point of focus; this is because there must be nothing outside in order to establish itself as a system of knowledge. Levin thinks that the advent of nihilism in philosophy is due to the lack of recognition that this model is not omnipotent. The absence of the cognitive horizon *as* horizon, “as that which both confines us within its limits and holds us open to the limitless beyond; as that which provides whole but never totality; as that which encourages hope, but mocks our human arrogance,”³⁹ leads to the Nietzschean negative view of the entire tradition of rationalistic humanism. Since the possibility of new knowledge is not opened until we recognize the limit of our current system, the concept of horizon is important as the first step to redemption. Levin's argument draws strongly on the philosophy of Heidegger, who first realized the blinding effect of the Cartesian eye, calling it an “enframing mode of vision,” which turns the world into a representation, a picture in a frame. In Heideggerian thoughts, it is this Enframing that paradoxically carries a redemptive power: the moment that we realize it, it is turned into “the safekeeping of Being.” Heidegger describes this in a dramatic language:

The turning of the danger comes to pass suddenly. In this turning, the clearing belonging to the essence of Being suddenly clears itself and lights up. This sudden self-lightening is the lightening-flash. It brings itself into its own brightness, which it itself both brings along and brings in.⁴⁰

This is the revelatory moment where man recognizes the blinding effect of Enframing and turns it into the conceptual horizon that Levin speaks of. As long as we take Enframing for granted, things beyond are not taken into

³⁹ Levin 72.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, Technology 44. See also the whole of “Turning” (Technology 36-49).

consideration and therefore equal to non-existence; but once we see the frame surrounding our visual field, it is transfigured into a safekeeping of the unknown possibilities. Hence the moment of recognition is of a sudden and dramatic nature as if it is incandescence or lightening. At such an occasion, the essence of Being is not merely passive but voluntarily lights itself up: once we become willing to see the frame/horizon that hides/discloses it, the higher truth acquires a power to emit light from within.

The way Forster describes the cave's wall and the match flame reflected is epistemologically very similar to this Heideggerian notion of Enframing. When the match is struck, our attention is first drawn to the fact that the light can make a very limited sphere visible. Unlike the optical device such as the field-glasses or the magnifying glass that encircles its scope of vision, the match flame has no outer structure to enclose the visual field; what one can see is the range of its light, while all the rest remains in profound darkness. Then, the wall comes forth as a definitive limit: the light can get closer to it, but never beyond. The stone, the "skin" of the cave, is observable for a few seconds, and it is so exquisitely beautiful as to create the atmosphere that there may be something desirable only if the flame can go through. The two flames are described in highly amorous terms, comparing them to the lovers who long to be united but cannot, for the moment of union is the moment of death. Of course, practically speaking, there can be nothing beyond the threshold but the stone; but what is crucially important here is that, by introducing the

mirror wall and another flame reflected on it, the narrative makes us *imagine* what is beyond the reach of the characters' current cognitive system. One might as well say that this is a modern version of Plato's allegory of the cave, in which there is no sun shining outside to be a dominant metaphor for truth and knowledge, but instead the transcendental is buried deep in the stone. The wall is exquisite because it has the power to hint at what is not here and not now—when man recognizes the limit of his ken, a beautiful limit/horizon of the Western epistemology is lit up. The flame burning in the stone “moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit”: the stone shines *from within* as if the unknown truth flashes up itself in order to send us the signs of its existence. A little later, the narrator says that the number of the sealed caves exceeds those with man-made entrances; one of them, a round-shaped, wobbling cave at the top, “mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely” (PI 111). Here again the narrative tries to evoke things whose presence does not rely on whether they are perceived or not.⁴¹

With all these new significances of the cave in mind, now it is understandable that, when Adela has a mysterious double vision at the court, the wall and match is entrusted with positive imagery: “Why had she thought the expedition ‘dull’? Now the sun rose again, the elephant waited, the pale masses of the rock flowed round her and presented the first cave; she entered, and a match was reflected in the polished walls—all beautiful

⁴¹ Beer reveals that this wobbling, empty cave at the top is Forster's fictional creation and sees it as his self-conscious comments on humanity in its own skepticism. See John Beer, “A Passage to India, the French New Novel and English Romanticism” 117-19.

and significant, though she had been blind to it at the time (PI 202, emphasis added). The wall can be a horrifying dead end for her rationalism; but, if she chooses to see it in a different way, it becomes a starting point of new knowledge. Nonetheless, just as the match flame cannot go through it, Adela should be satisfied with only running her finger along the wall. This is also what Levin sees as the endpoint of Heidegger's thoughts on vision. Heidegger's idea of Being is still Cartesian in the sense that it presumes a stable, essentially isolated and disembodied "self" that is encapsulated and obscured by modern technology. The meaning of his philosophy lies in his efforts to grow out of the nihilism of Nietzsche to illuminate the pure Being that is found in ancient Greek philosophy but later peripheralized by the growth of modern rationalism. On the other hand, what he calls "primordial experience" in Time and Being to be found outside Enframing remains unknown: he guides us to see the encompassing frame, but does not show how to overcome it. It is *how to think* that he teaches us as the most promising *action* that could be taken at present: "For thinking is genuine activity, genuine taking a hand, if to take a hand means to lend a hand to the essence, the coming to presence, of Being."⁴² Although he uses a metaphor of taking and lending hand, the Heideggerian moment of revelation is essentially static and visual—Enframing suddenly lit up. Similarly, Forster's last novel takes the hands of Adela to the metaphorical furthest bound of ongoing epistemology, and makes her stand still in front of it with the match flame. It is how to

⁴² Heidegger, Technology 40.

see and think about the threshold that is concerned here, rather than how to transgress it.

3.3. The Absent God and the Impartial Sky

The impulse to refer to things beyond perception but whose existence is not denied also takes a lucid form in the novel's arguments around the Hindu God. From the beginning, the narrative emphasizes his *absence*, but exactly because it is constantly referred to in the form of negation, the reader is made aware of his possible existence. The absence of God is first mentioned at Fielding's tea party, when Godbole's song puzzles the Western listeners. Godbole sings a religious song for the departing visitors; it is about a milkmaid calling Shri Krishna, but however eagerly she asks, the God refuses to come. Mrs. Moore, who is a Christian and believes that God loves man so much as to send his only son to the world, guesses that Krishna may come in other songs. "Oh no, he refuses to come," is Godbole's answer, "perhaps not understanding her question. 'I say to Him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come'" (PI 68). This conception of God as always absent is hardly intelligible to a Western mind, and the problem comes to the surface again when Fielding asks Godbole's opinion about whether Aziz is guilty or not. For Godbole, it is hard to say since in his philosophy nothing can be performed in isolation. If evil or good occurs, it is performed by the whole universe, and both are aspects of his God: "He is present in the one, absent in the other, and the difference

between presence and absence is great . . . Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, ‘Come, come, come, come’” (PI 158).

Perhaps this permanently absent God in A Passage to India should be examined in the light of the death of God in the modern world rather than of the esoteric Hindu doctrines. In modern literature, the absence of God matters less as a religious doubt than it did in the nineteenth century, but as the loss of the absolute, the dimension of the eternal. The image of God is always compounded of negation; he is—as we have the most representative expression in Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (1953)—a shadow of desire, an empty word, a promise of hope that will never be kept. Nevertheless, writers do not entirely drop the issue of God, for the “religious” impulse, the quest for the transcendent that is beyond all reason and proof, does not die out. Even in the world where the death of God is pronounced, there are still attempts to implore Him in the form of absence, blackness, or emptiness.⁴³ This is very much the case for A Passage to India: just as the novel’s frequent use of negation creates the impression that it may connote something of not entirely negative value,⁴⁴ and as the cave’s wall embodies the limit and the possibility at the same time, by appealing to the Hindu idea of the absent God, the novel secures a room for the unknown that can be established only in the mind. Again, this is a question of how to view one thing in a different way: absence and

⁴³ As for the death of God in the twentieth century literature, I have consulted Charles I. Glicksberg, Modern Literature and the Death of God (Hague: Nijhoff, 1966).

⁴⁴ See Gillian Beer.

non-existence may be two sides of the same coin, but if we go for the former, it starts to imply presence.

Among the novel's characters, Godbole seems to be the person who understands this logic most. Unlike the Christian God, his God includes the whole universe, both Good and Evil—this idea of the divine is quite unfamiliar to the British characters as well as to Aziz, a romantic Muslim. John Drew sees Godbole as a character with whom “the poet” in Forster wholly identifies.⁴⁵ As Drew succinctly summarizes, from the time of Alexander the Great, India has been associated in the European mind with the philosophic life, and later European Orientalists discovered almost total identity between Vedanta and Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and others in the third century. To this Neo-Platonist intellectual scheme, Forster accesses not only through his reading of Enneads, but also of the Romantic poets, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley, who regard the imaginative or magical experience at the heart of literature as self-contained and *imageless*. Since literature uses the medium of language, this “imagelessness” can be expressed only in negative terms. Drew thinks that Godbole is the one who gets closest to this mystic vision and that what seems to be his limit is in fact the limit of language, which can predicate the abstract only by some tangible form. We find one of the most abstract forms of imagelessness in the novel in the unopened cave at Kawa Dol mirroring darkness infinitely, but even this accompanies the husk of rock in order to give it an outer shape and make it

⁴⁵ John Drew, “The Spirit Behind the Frieze?,” John Beer, A Passage 81-103.

describable.

This “negative theology”—the invocation of God by emphasizing His inapproachability by any earthly concepts—has a very long tradition since its advent in Neo-Platonism, and bears more significance than a mere religious current in Western thoughts: it is concerned with a desired philosophical insight into an ultimate, final Reality as the divine cause or source, from which all beings come and from which they derive their meaning.⁴⁶ Hence this “theology” encompasses ontology and metaphysics—the areas of philosophy which secures the realm of the transcendent and unknown. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, with the increasingly anthropocentric view of the world, the negative theology flourished as a sign of embarrassment about the hubris of humanity, and it is in this sense that, in this period, negative theology emerged as the first symptom of modernity. In the following ages, a belief in the limitless possibilities of human reason so characteristic of the Enlightenment and seventeenth-century Cartesian rationalism comes to be combated by negative theology, a minor but significant current of thought. Among the thinkers of the twentieth century, Heidegger, with his concept of pure Being located outside of Enframed reality, can be counted as one of those who most reflect this tradition of negative theology. Heideggerian Being is fundamentally ungraspable, pre-linguistic, and accordingly, can be expressed only in negation. He presents the word “to be” as the problem of thinking, and locates Being outside the concepts of both objectivity and

⁴⁶ Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate, eds., Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology (New York: Fordham UP, 2000).

subjective human experience. Pure Being precedes any reality: objectivity too needs Being before it becomes a being, becomes articulated. Being withdraws from any definition—it cannot be pinned down, it is not static, but functions literally as *verb*, as indicator of action, and moves through language without being reduced to it.⁴⁷ Arguably, this “negative theology of language” is inherited by the theorists of deconstruction, especially Derrida. Like negative theology, his notion of “différance” affirms the effectiveness of a “nonpresence” when it endorses the absence of the origin of all meaning. Of course this does not mean that Derrida presumes any other ontology or semantics outside our current linguistic system, and deconstruction and negative theology cross only to diverge again when the former self-consciously declares that it subsumes the latter as the characteristic of language.⁴⁸ But still it should be admitted that his texts contain “a subtle resumption of the destruction of onto-theology in the line of (and in discussion with) Heidegger.”⁴⁹ To sum up: in Western culture, negative theology has always been present and at work as “an *echo*—or better, a multifaceted whole of echoes,” a critical reaction to a dominant discourse of each era.⁵⁰ Even when the desire for transcendence is so neglected as to become nearly invisible, it is still *heard*: it haunts us as an ineradicable echo. It is very interesting that the word “echo” is thus applied

⁴⁷ For the aspects of negative theology in Heidegger in terms of his thoughts about language, see Bulhof and Kate 48-50.

⁴⁸ Hent de Vries, “The Theology of the Sign and the Sign of Theology: The Apophatics of Deconstruction,” Bulhof and Kate 165-193.

⁴⁹ Vries 186. The texts by Derrida taken up here are “La différance” and “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.”

⁵⁰ Bulhof and Kate 11.

by critics to the genealogy of negative theology, for this stands as yet another testimony of the strong connection between Western rationalism and logoculocentrism: when the former is challenged, almost automatically a “non-visual” metaphor is chosen. Of course this is applicable to Forster’s use of echoes all through A Passage to India.

In fact, some critics have pointed out a link between deconstruction and the rise of trauma theory, too. Those who first turned to trauma in the humanities were Paul de Man’s students at Yale; and this can be seen as their attempt to find a connection between critical theory, which had become highly abstract, and specific material events that are personal and implicate history, memory, and culture generally.⁵¹ It is possible to see that what we are participating in through the theory of trauma is “an epicycle in a larger historical movement, or a familiar swing of the pendulum in the eternal Western metaphysical opposition between the two poles of human existence and intellectual activity.”⁵² That is, it is the return of the “real,” which has been repressed in the critical movement of textualism. The traumatic event actually bears a striking similarity to the always already absent signified or referent of poststructuralist discourse, but it does so without falling back on the discredited notions of transparent referentiality often found in traditional historical discourse. The combination of the simultaneous undeniable reality of the traumatic event with its unapproachability offers the possibility for a seeming reconciliation between the undecidable text and the ontological status of the traumatic

⁵¹ Kaplan, Trauma Culture 34-35.

⁵² Douglass and Vogler 4.

event as an absolute signified.⁵³ Therefore, now we can see that Adela's experience in the cave, the wall as a cognitive horizon, and the novel's ceaseless call for the absent God, all point toward the same direction: they secure room for the absolute without losing the ground of historical materiality. This reading seems to have a merit of assuaging the impression that there is a split or chasm between the novel's philosophical contemplations and its realist plot, which some critics as well as Forster himself find in the novel.⁵⁴

In the final part of the novel "Temple," we are suddenly flung into a world where the God's presence is announced. The Hindu native state called Dewas, where Aziz is now employed, is in the midst of its religious festival, the annual celebration of Krishna's birth. This is to say that, if "Caves" is mainly about acknowledging the limit of our cognitive system, this part is concerned more with violating it. The description of the festival is strikingly full of animated sound and visual images as if to compensate for the overall impression of monotonousness and colorlessness in "Caves." From the beginning, the religious song is resounding through the palace, which is over-decorated so that its pillars and vaulting can be scarcely seen. Coloured rags, shining ornaments, photographs, a tiny silver figure of

⁵³ Douglass and Vogler 5.

⁵⁴ This is pointed out in various ways. For examples, see Trilling 126 and Crews 145. Benita Parry puts it another way: "the authority of the allegory [of the absent God] is throughout undermined by other modes within texts; as each positing of universal abstractions is countermanded by perceptions of the specifics in the historical situation, so the cosmic is cut down to size by the comic . . ." (Tambling 145-46).

Krishna—images overflow to dazzle one's eyes. The narrator says, however, none of these properly expresses Him:

. . . this approaching triumph of India was a muddle, (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form. Where was the God Himself, in whose honour the congregation had gathered? Indistinguishable in the jumble of His own alter, huddled out of sight amid images of inferior decent, smothered under rose-leaves, overhung by oleographs, outblazed by golden tablets representing the Rajah's ancestors, and entirely obscured, when the wind blew, by the tattered foliage of a banana. Hundreds of electric lights had been lit in His honor. . . . Yet His face could not be seen. (PI 254)

Here again, a line is drawn between the visible material and the invisible truth (=the God). It is also interesting to see that it is through his *sight* that Godbole, who is dancing and chanting amid the congregation in the state of holy rapture, recovers his senses: "It was long before the tiny fragment of Professor Godbole that attended to outside things decided that his pince-nez was in trouble, and that until it was adjusted he could not choose a new hymn" (PI 255). When one looks within and tries to be united with the God, it does not matter that he cannot see the outside world clearly; but sooner or later, the necessity of sight returns to arrange practical things in reality.

In the following scene, the narrative for the first and last time goes inside of Godbole's mind, and there again the "stone" is used as a material to mark the threshold. While he is dancing like a fanatic, an image of Mrs. Moore and a little wasp on the stone accidentally slips into his consciousness; and "he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction" (PI 255). The completeness here is assumed to be something like "imagelessness" mentioned above, since it should not be a reconstruction of

anything. Godbole is advancing toward this state by trying to love Mrs. Moore, the wasp, and the stone in turn, but it is with the last one that he fails and his consciousness returns:

His senses grew thinner, he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where, perhaps on a stone. He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God. And the stone where the wasp clung—could he ... no, he had been wrong to attempt the stone, logic and conscious effort had seduced, he came back to the strip of red carpet and discovered that he was dancing upon it. (PI 255-56)

His attempt to “imitate” God stumbles against the stone, and it may be remembered that the stone is what makes up the cave’s wall at Marabar. Again the effort to violate the unknown is prevented, but this paradoxically insinuates the presence of such a realm beyond our ken. It is true that Forster describes Godbole as a person who has a wider view of the world than any other character, but he too cannot accommodate the all-inclusive vision of the world. In this sense, one has to be careful in seeing him as a person embodying mystic vision.⁵⁵ Godbole too never attains the imageless vision, and it seems that this is to be attributed not only to the limit of language but also to the novel’s self-conscious gesture to detain even its most enigmatic character on this side of the wall and save the horizon *as* horizon. Actually, without this boundary, there would not be any language or narrative. Hence, at the moment of Krishna’s birth, the narrator inserts his self-reflective comments on fiction: “the human spirit had tried by a desperate contortion to ravish the unknown . . . Did it succeed? Books written afterwards say ‘Yes.’ But how, if there is such an event, can it be

⁵⁵ Here I have in my mind a sentence from Drew’s article—“Forster is left confronting not the limitations of Godbole so much as the limitation of the novel [as a medium]” (81). For me Drew seems to go a little too far here in almost identifying Godbole with the limitless, divine vision.

remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself?” (PI 257). This view that if there is no limit to encircle the world, there would be just imagelessness and therefore no word, suggests that Forster’s visual consciousness is, like Heidegger’s, essentially Cartesian. As Levin says, the true opening up of the horizon in philosophy does not arrive until Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out the physical nature of our visual experience that is left out from the whole rational tradition. As I am going to show in the following two chapters, this new understanding of sight as kinetic, somatic experience is seen in the novels of Virginia Woolf.

Before putting an end to this chapter, I should like to examine more closely the description of the sky in A Passage to India. If the perceptual horizon in the cave is an ultimate form which suggests the novel’s aspiration for a higher realm, the sky here and there mentioned reminds the reader of it in a more casual way. Not only in the first chapter, but in the following parts, too, the narrative repeatedly refers to the enormous sky and to the effect of diminishing the earthly events. For example, at the failed “bridge party,” it is only the sky above that really bridges the Anglo-Indian and the Indian:

Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites passed the mass or a vulture, and, with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again. . . . (PI 31-32)

This part again stretches one’s spatial imagination to the utmost point, and makes us think of the possible “impartiality” that is not achieved here and now. While the ever-expanding image of the sky here makes a negative

contrast with people's unfulfilled desire, it creates a peaceful atmosphere when Fielding and Aziz go to sleep on the roof of Nawab Bahadur's mansion after the banquet of victory. Over their heads hung "the constellation of the Lion, the disc of Regulus so large and bright that it resembled a tunnel, and when this fancy was accepted all the other stars seemed tunnels too" (PI 221). The romantic, starry image signifies the friendship attained, but from Forster's use of the sky in the previous parts, one may also augur that it would not last forever.

In "Temple," the description of the sky is combined with the so-called bird's-eye viewpoint and plays an important role in securing a room for hope, while the plot relates the wrecked friendship. Outside the excitement of Krishna festival, Fielding arrives with his wife and his brother-in-law; but Aziz, who has misunderstood that his friend married Adela, refuses to welcome them. Eventually they meet by accident and the friendship is regained. Just before coming across Fielding and Ralph, Aziz climbs up a hill with his children and sees the enormous tank and other buildings beneath, but at this point the beauty of the sight is undermined by his ill feeling towards the visitors: "The scenery, according to their standards, was delightful . . . But better not look close beneath, perhaps—nor towards the European Guest House either" (PI 265). It is not until the unfortunate misunderstanding is cleared that the overall view comes to be tinged with positive imagery. On the way to the Guest House to deliver the ointment to Ralph, Aziz, on horseback, once again looks down the same spectacle from high rocks: "Here he drew rein and examined the great Mau tank, which

lay exposed beneath him to its remotest curve. Reflecting the evening clouds, it filled the nether world with an equal splendour, so that earth and sky leant towards one another, about to clash in ecstasy" (PI 273). Considering the role that has been given to the sky, this passage describing earth and sky about to be united ignites the expectation that something positive might follow. Presently, however, "[h]e spat, cynical again, more cynical than before. For in the centre of the burnished circle a small black blot was advancing—the Guest House boat" (PI 273). Aziz's feeling is still in a rigidified state, but later at the Guest House he makes friends with Ralph, who has an intuitive understanding about human relationship like his mother Mrs. Moore, and takes him to the tank on the other boat. Without their knowing, the two boats are approaching each other on the "burnished circle" of the tank as if guided by an invisible hand—one might think that this is resonant with the episode of two flames in "Caves." At last, they clash not only against each other but also into the sacred tray of Krishna, which is thrown away into the tank every year at the final stage of festival. This process is necessary as the God should be absent again so that a passage to Him is opened up: it is "a passage not easy, not now, not here; not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable: the God to be thrown was an emblem of that" (PI 281). When the two boats and the tray collide and everything and everyone is flung into the water, the narrator announces the climactic moment with some reservation: "That was the climax, as far as India admits of one. . . . Looking back at the great blur of the last twenty-four hours, no man could say where was the emotional

centre of it, any more than he could locate the heart of a cloud" (PI 282). As if it is a cloud visible from certain distance but ungraspable when approached, India and Indian God as the Other is here again resistant to an attempt to put it in the frame of verbal description.

Still, the bird's-eye views of Mau, though it is not exactly from the sky, gives "Temple" a certain biblical grandiosity, and prepare us for the mixture of despair and hope in the pathetic final scene. Friends again, but knowing that they would meet no more, Fielding and Aziz go for their last ride in the jungles. They argue politics in high spirits, but when it comes to the problem of their friendship, the fulfillment should be postponed:

"Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."

But the horse didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there." (PI 288)

What is most interesting about the visual sensitivity of this scene is that each object on earth is given distinct form and attention. One by one, things, from temples to the Guest House, come into view; with Fielding and Aziz, we are made to see one item at a time. The total effect seems to be analogous to medieval painting: there is no sense of "depth" strongly felt here, but things are spreading in front of a higher perspective with particular, irreducible attributes. What is more, the phrase "their hundred voices" turns one's mind to innumerable other things that are not listed here but which, nonetheless, have their own thoughts. Thus invoking almost a divine point of view, the narrative delivers the final sentence from

the sky—"no, not there." The novel closes with neither the characters' conversation nor their feeling, but the opinion of the sky, which is infinitely close to the divine gaze but not exactly so since the sky is still a substance of this world. With this biblical perspective from above, the novel barely secures a room for hope in the form of absence: if the political situation on earth changes, the heart-felt desire of two men might be realized.

Of course this is a feeble way of suggesting hope as it offers no practical solution, and I am not saying that the novel's adaptation of the higher perspective compensates for this. What I have been trying to show in this chapter is that the visual consciousness of A Passage to India shows characteristics of modernism much more than generally understood. Starting from the doubt about the tourist gaze, the novel more broadly questions whether Western epistemology could really attain the knowledge of the world. Then it witnesses its ocularcentric belief smashed in the fateful Marabar Caves, and consequently develops into the modernist technique of multiple perspective. With the emergence of multiple viewpoints and an epistemological horizon, it can be argued that A Passage to India is a novel that registers both a deep anxiety about the continuing validity of the consensus of realism and a strong desire to sustain it. Modernist writers put into question the realist narrator standing outside the novel's temporality, but still maintain the hope of objective representation. Hence the narrative perspective is multiplied—it continually shifts back and forth between the subjective, personal point(s) of view and the higher, but not completely transcendental and objective one.

If Forster appears to be much more conservative than writers such as Woolf or Joyce, it is perhaps because he holds the desire for objective representation more deeply. What he wishes to do is to bring a fundamentally rational understanding of the world to its breaking point, but not to overturn it from the bottom. He invites us to see the threshold, but does not let us go beyond.

If we consult Levin's theory of opening vision once more, the visual consciousness of Forster's fiction stays with Heidegger. Drawing on Heidegger's critique of the Enframed perception and his allusions to the sky and the horizon in Greek philosophy as the sign of human humbleness, Levin asserts the potential redemption that may come from our acknowledgement of the horizon:

It is at the horizon that the overarching sky grants to us healing vision, a sense of human life in its wholeness; and yet, the meaningfulness it gives is *not* a wholeness which we can totalize, totally comprehending its gift. The horizon teaches us understanding, not knowledge. At the horizon, region of enchantments, the overarching sky *embraces* our existence with an encompassing meaningfulness that is benevolent precisely because it *withdraws* from the reach of our understanding, and *withholds* from us any final disclosure of meaning or purpose. Its gift is a wholeness which is open, rather than closed; a meaningfulness which can be deeply felt, but never reduced to the concepts of our calculative rationality. And whether we see that or not—that is the true measure and bounty of our lives.⁵⁶

One cannot miss the resemblance that this passage bears to Forster's Indian sky. When the novelist stretches his point of view further towards the East and recognizes the limit of Western rationalism, his eyes turn up to the sky, the only thing that seems to bridge them impartially. By doing so, he narrowly escapes a completely discouraging view about the friendship between the two.

⁵⁶ Levin 85. For the Greek allusions to the sky and the horizon that Heidegger refers to in his writing, see also 82-86.

Chapter 4

“The Mind’s Eye Is Only By Courtesy an Eye”:

Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Refutation of the Cartesian Eye

Virginia Woolf begins her essay “The Moment: Summer’s Night” (1929) with an inquiry, “what composed the present moment?” and the answer immediately given is that it is “largely composed of visual and of sense impressions.”¹ Set in twilight, however, the rest of the essay is not really concerned with the visual; on the contrary, as it gets darker, the reader’s attention is drawn more and more to impressions gathered by other senses. It is said that “the sense of the light sinking back into darkness seems to be gently putting out with a damp sponge the colour in one’s own eyes,”² and one becomes more aware of the damp, hot air touching the skin and pays more attention to the conversation going on and the emotion invested in it. It is as if, when the information coming through the eye is more or less shut out, one’s other senses alternatively become acute. Finally, just before the essay ends, a nameless sensation, an ecstasy arrives:

Then comes the terror, the exultation; the power to rush out unnoticed, alone; to be consumed; to be swept away to become a rider on the random wind, the tossing wind; the tramping and neighing wind; the horse with the blown-back mane; the tumbling, the foraging; he who gallops for ever, nowhither traveling, indifferent; to be part of the eyeless dark, to be ripping and streaming, to feel the glory run molten up the spine, down the limbs, making the eye glow,

¹ Virginia Woolf, “The Moment: Summer’s Night,” Collected Essays 2:293-97. Note that already in this phrase, a distinction is made in Woolf’s mind between the visual impressions and those of other four senses.

² Woolf, “The Moment” 293.

burning, bright, and penetrate the buffeting waves of the wind.³

What is striking about this Paterian moment of intense sensation may be the excessively kinetic image it evokes and the juxtaposition of paradoxical terms—the eye glowing in the eyeless darkness.⁴ It is not even possible to decide whether the eye is the imaginary horse's or the rider's; rushing out from the realm of ordinary experience, the eye here seems to be not the one in the usual sense but an almost inhuman faculty to see something essential in the complete darkness. In the collection of her autobiographical writings Moments of Being (1976), Woolf writes about many of the privileged moments that she experienced in her childhood, which are again marked with the absence of sight's dominance over other senses. For example, "Sketch of the Past" opens with "the purest ecstasy" that the infant Virginia experienced at St. Ives, hearing the waves breaking at the shore. In those days, Woolf looks back, "what was seen would at the same time be heard . . . sounds indistinguishable from sights. Sound and sight seem to make equal parts of these first impressions."⁵

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the novelists who wrote a little earlier than Woolf such as James and Forster were anxious about sight's ability to reach knowledge, and their novels can be read as their struggle to fill up the gap. Compared with them, Woolf seems to be more at

³ Woolf, "The Moment" 296.

⁴ One cannot miss the likeness between the passage and Walter Pater's famous dictum in "Conclusion" to The Renaissance—"To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life." Walter Pater, The Renaissance, 1873, ed. Adam Philips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 152. For Pater's strong but hidden influence on Woolf's aesthetics, which she was reluctant to admit, see Perry Meisel, Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980).

⁵ Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002) 79-80.

ease with the diminished authority of vision and consciously uses it for creating her own, new aesthetic. Woolf criticism usually pays much attention to the role of the visual in her writings, and it is true that she is an intensely visual novelist, who developed her style under the influences of Post-Impressionism, especially the art theories of her friends Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and the paintings of her sister Vanessa.⁶ It has been also revealed that Woolf was a keen photographer and cinema-goer, and her concept of the visual might be considerably affected by these newly emergent optical devices.⁷ What I aim to do in this and the following chapters is by no means to underestimate these aspects, but to cast a light on a relatively unexplored issue: in the privileged moment called “the moment of being” in her writing, the eye is not so dominant, but rather, its ability to see seems to be moderated or relativized. As suggested in the above two examples, if the weakening or underdevelopment of sight is linked to that of ego, can Woolf’s invocation of this eyeless (or sometimes half-eyeless) state work as a sort of release, or at least as a possible antidote to socially constructivist assumptions about the nature of subjectivity and selfhood?

⁶ For these aspects of Woolf’s writing, there is a large amount of literature. See, for the best-known examples, David Dowling, Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf (NY: St. Martin’s P, 1985). Diane Filby Gillespie, The Sister’s Art: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1988), Jane Goldman, The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), and Torgovnick.

⁷ For the influence of the contemporary visual culture on Woolf, see Humm; Diane F. Gillespie, “Her Kodak Pointed at His Head: Virginia Woolf and Photography,” The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf, ed. Diane F. Gillespie (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1993) 113-47; Leslie Kathleen Hankins, “Across the Screen of My Brain: Virginia Woolf’s ‘The Cinema’ and Film Forums of the Twenties,” Gillespie, Multiple Muses 148-79.

In the introduction, we have seen that Western culture has a tradition of privileging sight since as early as the Greek philosophers, but it is particularly with Cartesian dualism that the closest association of sight with the mind emerged. Broadly speaking, Descartes needed to emphasize the mind's superiority over the body in order to establish a system of objective knowledge, and under this impulse, in Optics (1637) he advanced a peculiar model of the eye under the perfect control of the mind. However, the last century saw a gradual erosion of the dominance of Cartesian dualism, and feminist critics began to attack the erasure of the body in his philosophy as the sign of a flight from the feminine and towards a masculinized, objectivist system of knowledge.⁸ Cartesian ocularcentrism—the mode of seeing that is to offer a rational understanding of the world—was also exposed to criticism in this feminist context. As in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" which stands as an exemplary argument, from the mid-1970s to mid-80s feminists designated the act of seeing as a site of male dominance.⁹ Mulvey's view of society is essentially Freudian: it requires a constant renewal of the castrated woman in order to stabilize patriarchal orders and meanings. Hence the "male gaze" is ubiquitous, turning the female body

⁸ For example, see Susan Bordo, The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesian Culture (NY: State U of New York P, 1987). Bordo reads Descartes's Meditations as a "drama of parturition," a cultural birth out of the mother-world of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance into the modern. The suppression of the body is interpreted in the psychological context of the separation anxiety from the maternal body.

⁹ Another representative work from this period is Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman (1974), but it is Simone de Beauvoir who started the feminist argument on gaze as early as in 1940s. For the general history of feminists' theorization of the gendered gaze in relation to the female body, I have consulted Amelia Jones, ed., The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader (London: Routledge, 2003) 369-71. See also Jacobs 9-18 and Jay 523-42.

into an object of gaze to serve the male subject.¹⁰ What is not entirely satisfactory about this theorization of the gaze in this period, however, is that, with the emphasis on the power of the masculine gaze and the sacrifice that women pay to sustain it, it carries a danger of strengthening the very gender dichotomy that it attacks.¹¹ In other words, as long as one thinks about the eye as an organ in the service of the mind, one cannot be freed from the almost obsessive notion that the subject is formed by the Other's gaze. This negative conception of vision is not only a specialty of feminism, but prevalent in twentieth century philosophy—from Jean-Paul Sartre's violent disgust for the illusions of sight (which seems to be assimilated by De Beauvoir, too) to Michel Foucault's theory of the panoptic gaze as the locus of power. Rethinking sight as a physical act, then, opens up the possibility of growing out of this wholesale denigration of vision in the twentieth century. The eyeless sensation in Virginia Woolf can be regarded as one innovative and highly progressive attempt to break through the mind-eye connection whose origin can be traced back to Descartes's optical model: she describes vision not as a location of the mind's work but as a *physical* perception, merging it with other bodily sensations to the extent that they become inseparable from one another, and by doing so, she tries to register the knowledge and experience which

¹⁰ Jones 44-53.

¹¹ Andrea Dworkin's polemic against pornography, which argues that seeing the woman's body in pornography practically has the same effect as having a sexual intercourse with her, may be regarded as one of the most extreme examples of the notion that a representation of the female body is always disadvantageous for women (Jones 369-70). From the male side, John Berger talks about the male gaze that the woman has unconsciously internalized through culturally constructed image of the desirable female. See John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: BBC, 1997) 36-64.

would slip through the net of existing codes of language.

4.1. “The Enormous Eye”: Roger Fry’s Influence

First it should be noted that in her writings, Woolf frequently draws a clear line between the mind’s eye and this alternative mode of seeing. For example, let’s look at the invisible narrator of “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” (1930), who is enjoying a solitary walk on London streets.¹² Leaving behind room and house, where one should be “the self our friends know us by,” a person becomes “part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers.”¹³ The narrator thinks that this anonymity strengthens our sight: “The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these winkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye.”¹⁴ Shedding the husk of the self behind, the eye in this passage is meant to be read as the antithesis of ‘I’.¹⁵ It does not delve into the depth of things to supply rational explanations but simply observes the scenes in London: “The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream; resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks.”¹⁶ This eye moves on the surface of things while the brain sleeps—it is merely

¹² Virginia Woolf, “Street Haunting: A London Adventure,” 4:155-66.

¹³ “Street Haunting” 155.

¹⁴ “Street Haunting” 156.

¹⁵ Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 13.

¹⁶ “Street Haunting” 156

an organ to see without accompanying any thought, to say nothing of the work of the rational mind. Many such anti-Cartesian eyes recording the stimuli of the urban city are found in modern literature. To mention a few, Charles Baudelaire's Les spleen de Paris (1869), James Joyce's Ulysses (1922), and Woolf's Mrs Dalloway (1925) are full of scenes perceived by this type of eye: images on the street come and go with no particular reason and motivation except that they are the multiple aspects of modern life.

In recent years, critics have examined this autonomous eye not so much as the modernist writer's self-invented aesthetics but as an outcome of a specifically historical background.¹⁷ In the nineteenth-century, rapid technological developments altered ideas about human sight on an unprecedented scale. Medical science became increasingly dependent on devices that translated invisible conditions of the body into visual representations (both graphic and numeric ones—photography, thermometry, sphygmography, radiography, and so on). Toward the end of the century, the invention of the X-ray (1895) and Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography (the late 1870s) made revolutionary changes: whereas the X-ray made it possible to see the human skeleton, which could never have been visible in a living person before, chronophotography turned “time” into a visible form of representation. These inventions radically disturbed the boundary between the invisible (and therefore thought of as subjective) and the visible (and believed to be objective truth). One can imagine what a severe damage this was to the Cartesian mind's eye: when

¹⁷ The following argument is indebted to Tim Armstrong, Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) and Danisus.

it became clear that there was, actually had always been, a source of knowledge inaccessible to the human eye, the theoretical attempt to make the eye an omnipotent supplier of truth was forever undermined. The derangement of the traditional division between the visible and the invisible, however, simultaneously instigated the rapid re-categorization of vision and visuality. A distinct line was drawn between what is seen by the scientific vision with the aid of technology and what is naturally visible to the human eye. The “naked eye” was thus historically conceptualized—it was born with the recognition that there is a field of knowledge available only for the former, not the latter.

From the late nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century, this “naked” eye, which is not necessarily connected to the system of knowledge, had been eagerly exploited as an aesthetic metaphor. In Modern Painters, Ruskin claims “the innocence of the eye” to emancipate visual art from the regulative rules of the Academy, and records a dialogue between J. M. W. Turner and a naval officer as something epitomizing its spirit. Seeing one of Turner’s pictures of a ship on the sea, the officer expressed his bewilderment as he could not find the porthole there, which he knew for sure that the ship was equipped with. Turner answered that he too knew that the porthole was there, but he did not draw it since he could not see it because of the mist. He painted what he saw, not what he knew.¹⁸ This serves as a fit example of how the separation of sight and knowledge would prompt the birth of a new aesthetics. While his contemporaries enjoy

¹⁸ John Ruskin, The Works of John Ruskin, eds., E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, Vol. 33 (London: Allen, 1908) 210.

the picturesque painting, Ruskin sees the undesirable distortion of Nature and claims that the painter must draw as the world appears to his naked, innocent eye. His dislike of the Claude glass is particularly helpful in grasping this point. A Claude glass is a slightly convex tinted mirror, which was supposed to help artists produce paintings similar to those of Claude Lorrain (1600-82). William Gilpin encouraged tourists and amateur artists to use a Claude glass,¹⁹ but for Ruskin, such an artificial change imposed on Nature is nothing short of blasphemy. His literal preference for the naked eye over an optical device coincides with his insistence that the artist should free himself from all existing knowledge and, as his famous phrase goes, “go to nature, rejecting nothing.” Ruskin was thoroughly antagonistic to the advance of modern technology on the same ground as his detestation of a Claude glass: anything that could cause changes to Nature is sacrilegious. At the bottom of Ruskin’s art theory lies the belief that Nature as God’s making is beautiful and good, and the ideal state that art should pursue is the faithful copy of Nature. In this respect, his “innocence of the eye” principle is tied up with his Victorian moral and religious concerns, which would disappear from the art criticism of the next generation with the decline of Christianity and the complete assimilation of modern technology into daily life.

Several decades later, as an advocate of Post-Impressionist painting in England, Roger Fry also explores the vision that is disconnected from existing knowledge, but this time he divides it into some sub-categories in

¹⁹ Andrews 67-73.

order to differentiate his theory from Ruskinian, Impressionist aesthetics. The first step he takes in “The Artist’s Vision” is to distinguish “seeing,” which is essentially a social act, and “looking at” as a more purely sensuous experience. Fry names this “seeing” as the “practical vision”: “In the practical vision, we have no more concern after we have read the label on the object; vision ceases the moment it had served its biological function” (VD 34). The purpose of this vision is to obtain the information necessary for our survival in society, so it does not pay attention to the pure appearance of things. Children, who have not fully learnt this type of vision, sometimes “look at” things not for practical reasons but for some peculiarity of appearance that catches their eye. They look at flowers with passion simply because they are beautiful; they collect objects like stones and fossils due to their unusual shapes or colors. Fry calls this type “curiosity vision,” but this is not the last entry Fry proposes in this essay. The third seeks “harmony of form and colour” in objects. To arouse such vision, the object must be more than a “curio” but a work of art, whose forms and colors absorb the viewer’s attention. When we indulge in this type of vision, we are cut off from our daily existence: here, “no element of curiosity, no reference to actual life, comes in; our apprehension is unconditioned by considerations of space and time” (VD 35). While this “aesthetic vision” is more concerned with the viewer than the creator of an artwork,²⁰ Fry thinks that the artist’s main task is to use another, fourth

²⁰ Fry says that the artist himself may engage in the “aesthetic vision” in his spare hours. But this vision and the creative vision are mutually exclusive. As the example of Walter Sickert shows, once the artist starts using his creative vision to produce his own artwork,

kind of vision. What he calls “the creative vision” demands the most complete detachment from the meanings and implications that the object has in life. When the artist puts it into operation, the chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colors in his visual field begins to “crystallize” into a harmony in accordance with his personal taste; then “his actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him,” and particular lines and colors begin to stand out quite irrelevantly to their meaning and value in the normal context. For example, a man’s head may be no more or no less important than a pumpkin.

Fry’s classification of these four visions marks his effort to liberate art from the plane of appearance. As J. B. Bullen says in his introduction to Vision and Design, how things appear is always the starting point of discussion in Fry’s mind (VD xi). The distinction he makes between seeing and looking at echoes Ruskin’s thoughts: for a new epoch of art, we should shake off the existing ideas and thoughts that we have cultivated in daily life so as to regain “the innocence of the eye,” which covers, roughly speaking, Fry’s “curiosity vision” and “aesthetic vision.” Nonetheless, at this stage, vision still lingers on appearance. Impressionism is a trend in visual art which puts into practice the innocence of the eye principle, but Fry wishes to go one step further and achieve art’s complete detachment from how things look. He thinks that Western art since the High

his “aesthetic vision” ceases to operate. The different visions are “like the different gears of a motor-car” (37), so if he is indulging in the creative vision when he is asked to estimate someone else’s work, his answer is likely to be unreliable.

Renaissance became more and more engaged in verisimilitudes, “a series of brilliant but superficial tricks to entertain the mind” (VD xvi), and forgot that the artist’s primary function was to give expression to the imaginative life. As he once called it the “Kodak Company method,” this tendency reached its apogee with the Impressionist endeavor to pin down fleeting images on the canvas (VD xvi). Fry therefore suggests another category of vision even more removed from practical life: the creative vision, which works according to the internal law of the artist’s sensibility and searches out new visual experiences.

In the years around 1920, the period when Woolf and Fry became close friends,²¹ she wrote a number of essays and short stories to try out the possibility of his aesthetics in her own medium of language. Fry’s doubt about the pursuit of verisimilitude in painting is matched by Woolf’s questioning of the method of realism in literature. Both of her famous essays, “Modern Fiction” (1919) and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924), were written in this period and attempt to make us see that, in her age, traditional, realistic representation no longer gives sufficient expression to the reality of human life.²² In these essays she criticizes the method of

²¹ We know that, though Fry started his visit to the Bells’ home, Gordon Square, in 1910, it took years for Woolf to develop a truly personal friendship with him, largely because of Fry’s affair with Vanessa and her own mental illness. In 1918, Woolf wrote in her diary: “Roger & I get on very well now; more genuine & free than we were, under the shadow of Gordon Square.” The Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Oliver Bell, Vol.1 (NY: Harcourt, 1977), 224. For the general account of their friendship and influence, I have also consulted Jonathan R. Quick, “Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Post-Impressionism,” The Massachusetts Review 26 (1985) 547-70.

²² “Modern Fiction,” Collected Essays 2: 103-10; “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Collected Essays, 1:319-37. As Zwerdling points out, although it is generally believed that Woolf is against realism, largely due to her well-known attack on the Edwardian “materialists” in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” what she really does is not so much to deny realism itself as to doubt whether it is the only way to describe the reality of human life. Zwerdling

Edwardian novelists (those she names are H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy), calling them “materialists”²³: they devote their power of observation too much to the external, material circumstance surrounding the character, and neglect the character itself, to which she gives a metaphorical presence of Mrs. Brown, a common-enough-looking elderly woman travelling in the corner of a railway carriage. “An Unwritten Novel” (1920) is also about such an old lady, whose lonely sorrowful face makes the narrator name her “Minnie Marsh” and imagine the ups and downs of her life. At the end, the train arrives at her destination, where her son is waiting; the sight of their going home together leaves the narrator in a state of disillusion as well as admiration at the indecipherability of life. In short stories from this period, too, Woolf examines Fry’s theory in various ways, and finally, in “Solid Objects” (written in 1918 and published in 1920), comes to realize its shortcomings for her own medium of art.²⁴ “Solid Objects” first puts forward a distinction

argues that “the enormous eye” in “Street Haunting” stands for the state she thinks a modern novelist should aspire to: an ability to shift the narrative point of view quickly and make external descriptions illuminate the inner, psychic process. As I am going to show in the following part, I do not entirely agree with Zwerdling on this point. It may be true that Woolf thinks of “the enormous eye” as an innovative device to resist the aspects of modern life, but she gradually becomes aware of its limit and departs from its aesthetics. For Zwerdling’s discussion on Woolf and realism, see 9-37. See also a chapter on Woolf in Jesse Matz, Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 174-206.

²³ “Modern Fiction” 105.

²⁴ “Solid Objects,” The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf, ed. Susan Dick, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Harvest 1989) 102-7. For Woolf’s short stories written under the strong influence of Fry, see Panthea Reid Broughton, “The Blasphemy of Art: Fry’s Aesthetics and Woolf’s Non-‘Literary’ Stories,” Gillespie, Multiple Muses 36-57 (especially 54-56 for the reading of “Solid Objects”). Broughton thinks that “‘Solid Objects’ represents Woolf’s mature assessment of and distancing from formalism, from what Fry termed in “The Artist’s Vision” the “blasphemy” of art. . . . It facetiously shows that mere disinterested contemplation of aesthetic objects is not an effective way or meaningful way to live in this world” (56). Other short stories taken up in this article are “The Mark on the Wall” (1917), “Kew Gardens” (1919), “The Evening Party” (1921), and “Blue and Green” (1921). For the dynamic relationship between Woolf and Fry’s aesthetics, see also Christopher Reed,

similar to Fry's "seeing" and "looking at." Two university students Charles and John are arguing about politics on the shore, but John starts groping the sand, and his sight goes through a kind of transformation:

As his hand went further and further beyond the wrist, so that he had to hitch his sleeve a little higher, his eyes lost their intensity, or rather the background of thought and experience which gives an inscrutable depth to the eyes of grown people disappeared, leaving only the clear transparent surface, expressing nothing but wonder, which the eyes of young children display.²⁵

His eye, which has been backed up with the rational work of mind, gives away to its primal function, and presently John picks up a beautiful piece of green glass washed by the sea for ages. After this incident, he grows more and more preoccupied with the solid objects which give his eye purely aesthetic pleasures. He starts to collect objects which have the unusual shape, line, or color, and pays less and less attention to keeping up appearances. He frequents places like waste land or sites of demolished houses to find objects that satisfy his urge, forgetting important appointments with his co-workers. In the end, his career as a politician is shattered, and all his friends abandon him. "Solid Objects" can be read as a story about the excess of Fry's "curiosity vision." As John's enthusiasm increases, he gets less and less desirable as a social being. His figure as an outcast suggests that being alone in the world of purely visual pleasure is after all not an ideal state for the Woolfian fictional world.

However, it takes quite a while until Woolf develops her own strategy, growing out of Fry's strong influence. Jacob's Room (1922) written two

"Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics," Twentieth Century Literature 38:1 (1992) 20-43.

²⁵ "Solid Objects" 102-3.

years later is conceptually very similar to “An Unwritten Novel”: the narrator ostensibly takes up the realist method and describes Jacob Flanders from outside, but with the keen awareness that it is not omnipotent and that his inner, true being is always hidden from its gaze. In other words, Jacob’s Room consciously highlights the gap between sight and knowledge.²⁶ This is clear from the first scene, where the narrative identifies with the vision of Mrs. Flanders, whose eyes are filled with tears because of her sorrow as a widow:

Slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop; for there her pen stuck; her eyes fixed, and tears slowly filled them. The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor’s little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun. She winked quickly. Accidents were awful things. She winked again. The mast was straight; the waves were regular; the lighthouse is upright; but the blot had spread. (JR 3)

This is a telling passage to show that our vision of the external world cannot always serve as a stable source of knowledge, deeply affected as it is by our subjective feelings. With the upsurge of her emotion, the whole scenery is distorted strangely as if melting down. Though it soon recovers its normal state, the ink blot stays on her letter as a visible sign of her disturbed feelings.²⁷ The next moment, the viewpoint suddenly switches to

²⁶ Reed tells us that Woolf got the idea of Jacob’s Room on the next day of her hearing Fry’s discourse on African carving. He thinks that the opening scene of the novel, where the painter Steele is painting Mrs. Ramsay, suggests the disconnection between sight and knowledge as the narrative strategy: “Here the painter’s rejection of seeing-as-having is translated into the author’s refusal to authoritative knowledge” (Reed 28).

²⁷ Two other scenes are described through the curtain of Mrs. Flander’s tears early in the novel; this may further suggest Woolf’s strong inclination to point out the subjectivity of our vision. The one is on the same page: “Seabrook is dead. Tears made all the dahlias in her garden undulate in red waves and flashed the glass house in her eyes, and spangled the kitchen with bright knives . . .” (JR 3). The other one appears when Mrs. Flanders is reading a love letter from her children’s tutor: “Seabrook came so vividly before her. She shook her head and was looking through her tears at the little shifting leaves against the yellow sky when three geese, half-running, half-flying, scuttled across the lawn with Johnny behind them, brandishing a stick” (JR 15).

that of Charles Steele, who is painting Mrs. Flanders on the beach, and then, to little Jacob's. By thus quickly shifting the point of view among several characters, the narrative creates the atmosphere that the narrator's, too, is one of these subjective viewpoints, and by doing so relativizes the idea of the realist, omnipotent narrator. It may be in this sense Woolf wrote in her diary that with Jacob's Room she "found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice."²⁸

This does not mean that Jacob's Room thoroughly denies vision's ability to light up some truth, though: on the contrary, it still seems to marvel at its potential. This is felt in a passage like the following one. After introducing different impressions that people have of Jacob, the narrator goes on to say:

It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us—why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.

Such is the manner of our seeing. Such is the conditions of our love.
(JR 60)

The phrase "life is but a procession of shadows" echoes the Platonic cave, where people entertain themselves with the false appearance of things: similarly, the narrator sighs, we are living among people whose true personality is never really known. What we can see is only external

²⁸ Quoted in Sue Roe, introduction, Jacob's Room, by Virginia Woolf, xi-xliii at xi. In relation to this point, Christine Froula puts forward the idea of "the essayist-narrator," which she thinks is a unique feminist form of narrative Woolf invented for Jacob's Room. See Christine Froula, Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity (NY: Columbia UP, 2005) 74-78.

characteristics such as gender, age, or basic temperament. But from time to time, “a sudden vision” arrives to make us believe that we have grasped some essence of a person, or even of life itself. This is by no means a truth in the Platonic sense, though. The sudden recognition is not any kind of goal, and the next moment, it is gone; there is no sun, the centre of radiation, assuring absolute knowledge. In this way, it seems that the narrator of Jacob’s Room carries both subtle anxieties and also a deep trust in vision’s ability to carve out some truth, and this mixture lasts to the end. In the last scene, there is a moving gesture of Mrs. Flanders holding out the dead Jacob’s old pair of shoes. In one sense, they are just ordinary shoes and give us the impression that we, as well as the narrator, still do not know anything about Jacob. At the same time, it comes forward as evidence, a visible remnant of his (now forever lost) existence in this world.²⁹

In an essay written years later, Woolf makes it clearer that she is much influenced by Fry but at the same time distances herself from him, being a writer, not a painter. “Walter Sickert” (1934) takes the form of a dinner conversation.³⁰ The guests at the table are talking about life in London—the new system of traffic signals and ever increasing picture galleries. Then the problem of colors comes in: now that red and green are

²⁹ Sue Roe explains the significance of these shoes as Woolf’s final modernist gesture in that they epitomize “the idiosyncratic, essentially tactile nature of an individual human being” (JR xxxviii); thousands of them were lost in the First World War, but history books can never tell us about them. Roe also suggests that Woolf may have in her mind Van Gogh’s painting, A Pair of Shoes (1886) in this last scene, and that it is perhaps the reproduction of this painting that Jacob has in his college room (JR xxxvii-xxxix). In the next chapter I will be discussing the pair of shoes and Mr. Ramsay’s boots in To the Lighthouse together, in relation to Heidegger’s essay on this painting of Gogh.

³⁰ “Walter Sickert,” Collected Essays, 2:233-44.

so much used as signal colors, the diners are wondering, they might very soon suggest the action of “stop” and “go” only. This is another example of how technology affects modern visual sensibilities. When the two colors are applied to say “stop” and “go,” they are no longer simply red and green but bound to the meanings given by technology. Simultaneously, as a byproduct of this situation, red and green as “mere” colors without any social implication are conceptualized in their minds. Here the conversation takes a turn to the story of some curious insect in the primeval forest of South Africa. Allegedly, their eye is so much developed that they are practically all eye, with the diminutive body connecting the two large eyes; they are born with the flowers and die when they fade, eating and turning into the color of the flowers. No matter whether this insect exists in reality or not, the point is that it is given a metaphorical function to suggest the eye’s primal faculty to see the world with no cultural signification behind.³¹ The insect sees colors as colors, not even suspecting that they could mean anything but themselves. Then people start talking about Sickert’s painting: “When I first went into Sickert’s show . . . I became an insect—all eye.”³² In front of his works, one falls under the spell of beautiful colors and “flies” from one color to another in absolute rapture, until one becomes exhausted (before so long, for the life of color is glorious but short). But

³¹ Danius finds a very similar use of insect metaphor in Robert Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* (1930-32) when it describes the hero’s wandering in anonymous urban spaces: “That the hero’s eyes appear to operate autonomously, endowed with an agency all their own, is then peculiarly affirmed when the narrator likens Ulrich’s gaze to an insect. Such a metaphor detaches vision from the body at one stroke and locates it in a buzzing world of instinct, meanwhile transforming urban space into a landscape of flowering fields, indeed, into nature” (Danius 18).

³² “Walter Sickert” 235.

however temporary this experience is, the narrator says that it sets us to remember “the microscopic eye” that we lost when we left the primeval forest and entered into civilization. Since then, the eye shriveled and instead other bodily parts developed. Sickert’s paintings have the power to revive the microscopic vision in our eye, though even for a short time.

The rest of “Walter Sickert”—actually, three fourths of it—is devoted to the discussion of the relationship between art and literature. Woolf compares Sickert to an excellent biographer or novelist, for his paintings tell so much about people. One can imagine stories behind the scenes, and an episode where Sickert once called himself “a literary painter” is cited. Literature and painting undoubtedly have much in common, for the novelist “after all wants to make us see”;³³ all great writers are, therefore in her opinion, great colorists in the sense that their words skillfully evoke visual images to convey the character’s situation and feeling. In spite of these similarities, however, the diners are obliged to admit that, in Sickert’s pictures, there is a silent land lying beyond—something which cannot be put into words. It is the beauty of line and color. In vain people try to explain why these things give them pleasure, but they are inexplicable, appealing only to our insect-like, primitive form of vision. As Diane Filby Gillespie says, “Walter Sickert” shows not only Woolf’s profound interest in painting but also her impulse to bring back something from there to her own medium of art.³⁴ On the one hand, she is apparently enticed by the silence of painting detached from language and human

³³ “Walter Sickert” 241.

³⁴ Gillespie, *The Sister’s Art* 101-3.

concerns; it is a beauty that literature can never dream of. On the other hand, as the material for her writing, Woolf is never satisfied with things appealing only to one's "curiosity vision" or "aesthetic vision": in her works, the description of purely sensuous pleasures at some point always switches back to the issues of our existence in society. It is not sufficient for Woolf to explore the aesthetics of the "enormous/microscopic eye" (it is interesting that she applies these antonyms to the same concept), which is an outcome of the cutting off of the traditional mind-eye connection. What she needs to do is to find the equivalent of Fry's creative vision within her own field. Since language is a social construct, she cannot aspire to such a complete detachment as the visual artist's creative vision.

4.2. Cutting through the Mind-Eye Connection: Woolf's Feminist Strategy

To clarify, therefore, how Woolf develops her own, unique strategy of the visual, it would be rewarding to observe in more detail the procedures of her attack on Descartes' mind's eye. Perhaps it is in "The Sun and the Fish" (1928) that Woolf most explicitly tries to subvert it. This is the essay that Jane Goldman extensively discusses as Woolf's "manifesto" of a new feminist ontology of vision.³⁵ My argument has benefited enormously from her discussion, but here I would like to put more specific emphasis on how Woolf refutes the Cartesian model of the eye, which is the focus of my own interest. "The Sun and the Fish" opens with "an amusing game" of the eye:

³⁵ Goldman 13-106.

if one says to it several words irrelevant to one another (for example, “Athens; Segesta; Queen Victoria”), it always creates some ridiculously combined image. This is because, Woolf explains, “a sight will only survive in the queer pool in which we deposit our memories if it has the good luck to ally itself with some other emotion by which it is preserved. Sights marry, incongruously, morganatically (like the Queen and the camel), and so keep each other alive.”³⁶ This radically undermines the Cartesian model, bringing in factors that Descartes does not take into account—memories and emotion. To say that the sight of an object cannot survive without the aid of emotion means that it becomes no longer objective once it is stored in the mind as an image. Furthermore, with the vocabulary of matrimony, Woolf shrewdly merges the problems of sight and gender: the purity of objective sight is exposed to danger by marrying subjective aspects, but it is the only way to maintain its pedigree. Then Woolf launches a final blow to the Cartesian eye:

So, on this dark morning, when the real world has faded, let us see what the eye can do for us. Show me the eclipse, we say to the eye; let us see that strange spectacle again. And what we see at once—but the mind’s eye is only by courtesy an eye; it is a nerve which hears and smells, which transmits heat and cold, which is attached to the brain and rouses the mind to discriminate and speculate—it is only for brevity’s sake that we say that we ‘see’ at once a railway station at night.³⁷

What follows is the reminiscence of the eclipse that Woolf actually went to see in the previous year; but half way through, again, the eye goes astray and we are made to read about the London Zoological Gardens in summertime—lizards and fish in the artificial environment—for no reason.

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, “The Sun and the Fish,” *Collected Essays*, 4:178-83 at 178.

³⁷ “The Sun and the Fish” 178.

This “game of the eye” radically discloses the artificiality of the Cartesian eye: it is a carefully constructed faculty which assures the objectivity of sight and is by no means identical with how our optical system operates in reality. Therefore, the mind’s eye is “only by courtesy” an eye; the actual one is incorporated in the body and sees with the optic nerve linked to the brain just as we hear and smell thanks to the nerves in charge of respective perception. This eye is no longer disembodied—its reality as a part of the body is foregrounded in a way that is impossible within Western rational tradition of philosophy.

The unpredictability and physicality of vision thus foregrounded in Woolf is not found in Fry’s writing. Although unpredictability could always creep in any of his four types of vision, Fry does not pay much attention to this; rather, the emphasis falls on how to make us see the aspects of common objects overlooked by our ordinary mode of seeing. As for the physicality of vision, Fry follows Bernard Berenson’s well-known theory of “tactile values” in The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance. Speaking about Florentine figure-painting, especially that of Giotto, Berenson claims that the life-likeness of the people in Giotto incites within the viewer the feeling as if he is touching the person, and calls this “tactile values on the retinal impression,” by which he explains the mechanisms of the aesthetic pleasure born within us.³⁸ Similarly, Fry explains how the formal aspects of the object (shape, line, and color) affect our imaginative life by the

³⁸ See also chapter two for Berenson’s theory and Forster’s critique of it in A Room with a View.

physical response that they incite. What he counts as “the emotional elements of design” consists of the rhythm of the line, mass, space, light and shade, and color. According to Fry, each of them causes “emotions in us by playing upon what one may call the overtones of some of our primary needs” (VD 24): rhythm appeals to muscular activities, mass to our adaptation to the force of gravity, and so forth. However, the problem is that the way in which these physical reactions can be “emotional” remains unclear although he says that the emotional elements have the strongest power if combined with “the presentation of natural appearances, above all with the appearance of the human body” (VD 25). This seems to contradict his main theme that art should have nothing to do with appearance. While Fry thus shows some uncertainty about the relationship between the physicality of vision and our emotions, Woolf speaks of it more openly and she strategically uses its whimsical aspects for her own purposes—to describe the momentary freedom from society and the potential discovery of one’s true selfhood in such a rare moment.

When Woolf foregrounds the physicality of vision, she always mixes it up with other sense perceptions; this seems to be her important tactic to maintain that our visual experience is unpredictable, as are our other senses, and that their very unpredictability offers the opportunity to register the knowledge and experience which would be lost under the dominance of the mind’s eye. This is the case with the privileged moment in “The Moment: Summer’s Night,” which we have examined at the beginning of this chapter. This essay is written in the year after “The Sun

and the Fish,” and there Woolf introduces sight undifferentiated from other senses. People are chatting outdoors in the evening; one sees the surroundings less and less clearly, and hears and feels more sharply instead. Then the ecstatic moment arrives, in which the eye sees something essential in darkness, but this is depicted as hardly separable from the impact met by one’s whole physique—it is as if one were dashing through the scene on horseback. The passage that immediately follows this scene indicates that the intensity of the moment comes from the fact that, in complete darkness, one is temporarily released from his/her social role or identity:

“Everything’s sopping wet. It’s the dew off the grass. Time to go in.”

And then one shape heaves and surges and rises, and we pass, trailing coats, down the path towards the lighted windows, the dim glow behind the blanches, and so enter the door, and the square draws its lines round us, and here is a chair, a table, glasses, knives, and thus we are boxed and housed, and will soon require a draught of soda-water and to find something to read in bed.³⁹

People go through the flame “square” of the door and then are accommodated (or “boxed”) in the house, which is lit up bright and full of civilized commodities. When one resumes playing his/her part, the sensuousness of even a moment ago is put to rest as if nothing happened, and sight again becomes the principal sense. We find a similar structure of the senses in Woolf’s childhood “purest ecstasy” in “Sketch of the Past,” which also consist of the mixture of sight and sound. The happy memories at St. Ives come back to her as “color-and-sound memories”; she says, “The strength of these pictures—but sight was always then so much mixed with

³⁹ “The Moment” 297.

sound that picture is not the right word—the strength anyhow of these impressions makes me again digress. Those moments—in the nursery, on the road to the beach—can still be more real than the present moment.”⁴⁰ These memories have the purity and intensity that the developed ego of an adult can no longer expect, and this is presented through the senses that are not yet specialized as in the case of a grown-up.

If we turn our eyes to another essay “On Being Ill” (1930), it may be guessed that what Woolf aims to do by mixing up sight and other senses has much to do with the problem of articulation and language.⁴¹ First Woolf expresses surprise that there is practically no literature on illness in spite of its commonness as well as the tremendousness of the spiritual changes it causes. She then ascribes to the poverty of language its inability to describe sickness and she sees a general tendency in both literature and philosophy to neglect the body and to focus primarily on the work of mind. Being ill is a rare occasion in which reason is asleep and a region in the mind like “a virgin forest . . . a snowfield where even the print of birds’ feet is unknown” is awakened.⁴² Illness here should not be taken literally: it is a metaphor like sleep for Coleridge, and stands for the work of the creative imagination excavating an unnoticed realm in the use of language. On being ill, we can discover new, so far unknown meanings of the word: “if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer

⁴⁰ *Moments of Being* 80.

⁴¹ “On Being Ill,” *Collected Essays*, 4:193-203.

⁴² “On Being Ill,” 196.

odour.”⁴³ When the work of reason is checked, senses grow keener and grasp new sensual meanings of words, which come forward not through the eye, but metaphorically as a taste or smell. The amalgamation of sight and other senses in Woolf’s writing, therefore, has significance beyond merely registering physical sensation for its own sake: it is a positive strategy to discover a “snowfield” of language, which has been hidden in the mind-eye episteme.

In her fiction, such a highly sensuous moment often leads a female character into an unexpected, intuitive understanding about herself. Its full signification I will be discussing in the next chapter on To the Lighthouse, but here I would like to take up a short story which was written in the same year as “On Being Ill” and which shows that even when such a moment is introduced as a most static, visual scene, Woolf does not forget to make it something more than visual. In “The Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’” (1926),⁴⁴ a young girl called Fanny receives an unusual impression from her piano teacher Miss Craye, an unworldly spinster. At the beginning Fanny dropped a pin on the floor and now she is searching for it, imagining in her heart things that might have happened between Miss Craye and her suitors when she was young and beautiful. Miss Craye always seems vaguely unsatisfied, seeking for beauty without fulfillment; in Fanny’s eyes, that frustration converges on her fingers because she is a pianist. However, when she finds the pin and

⁴³ “On Being Ill,” 200.

⁴⁴ “The Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’,” The Complete Shorter Fiction 215-20.

turns to Miss Craye, she is struck with her figure:

Fanny Wilmot saw the pin; she picked it up. She looked at Miss Craye. Was Miss Craye so lonely? No, Miss Craye was steadily, blissfully, if only for a moment, a happy woman. Fanny had surprised her in a moment of ecstasy. She sat there, half turned away from the piano, with her hands clasped in her lap holding the carnation upright, while behind her was the sharp square of the window, uncurtained, purple in the evening, intensely purple after the brilliant electric lights which burnt unshaded in the bare music room. Julia Craye, sitting hunched and compact holding her flower, seemed to emerge out of the London night, seemed to fling it like a cloak behind her, it seemed, in its bareness and intensity, the effluence of her spirit, something she had made which surrounded her. Fanny stared.⁴⁵

This is a scene highly visual like a painting, framed in “the sharp square of the window” with the purple backdrop of evening sky behind. But the emphasis also subtly falls on the carnation, suggesting that Julia holds an essence of beauty in her hands at this moment. Crucially, the carnation and the pin that Fanny has just picked up correspond, implying that something has been transmitted from the elder lady to the younger with so much intensity as to be almost physical. Then Julia (here the narrative suddenly chooses to call her by her first name) comes closer, takes Fanny in her arms and kisses her. Quite meaningfully, “Julia possesses her”; the story ends with Julia’s words “Slater’s pins have no points” and the close-up of Fanny’s trembling fingers trying to put the pin back on her dress.⁴⁶ The tactile sense of two women’s fingertips has such significance in this story, making invisible things rise to the visible surface. It is the richness of solitary life denied for a married woman, in which Julia has been seeking her own interests and thoughts, and the shock Fanny has felt may be due to her awakening to a choice in life so far unknown to her.

⁴⁵ The Complete Shorter Fiction 220.

⁴⁶ The Complete Shorter Fiction 220.

4.3. The Mind's Eye in the Modernist Epiphany

The moment of being in Woolf is usually thought of as a version of modernist “epiphany,”⁴⁷ but in many epiphanic moments in modern writings, sight seems more dominant and still connected to the mind, although seeing is ostensibly approved as an instantaneous act opposed to conventional modes of thinking. The literary movement whose theorization shows this tendency most may be Imagism, which may be called a poetic collection of epiphanic moments. Much influenced by French thinkers, notably by Henri Bergson’s idea of intuitive understanding and transcendental time,⁴⁸ Imagism’s chief theorist T. E. Hulme criticizes romantic sentimentalism and its infinitely expanding subject in poetry, and announces the epoch of dry, hard, classical verse. Hulme thinks that the

⁴⁷ Morris Beja, Epiphany in the Modern Novel (London: Owen, 1971). This is a classic study that designates epiphany as one of the most important characteristics of the twentieth century novel. Beja’s definition of epiphany is that it is essentially a Romantic phenomenon taken from the characteristic techniques and standards of poetry, marked with a sudden spiritual manifestation (whether from some object, event, or memorable phase of the mind) being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it (18). When we talk about modernist epiphany, we still seem to have this definition in mind, but there are studies that have attempted to modify or complement Beja’s argument in terms of epiphany’s origin, its relation to realism, or the significance of the object in such a moment. See, for example, Ashton Nichols, The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Modern Literary Moment (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1987); Wim Tigges ed., Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). Beja’s book has a chapter on Woolf, in which he says that to Woolf the moments themselves are far more important than the meanings they involve, and in this sense she is closer to Pater than Joyce. It is true that Woolf leaves those moments unexplained and mysterious, but my argument attempts to pin down the signification of them, which could be missed by Beja’s Romantic reading of epiphany, in which the work of mind is predominant. Also, in the next chapter, I would like to discuss more on the relationship between subject and object in epiphany, the point Nichols’ study focuses on.

⁴⁸ For the French influence on Hulme’s theory, see Peter Jones ed., Imagist Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 28-30.

imagist “image” should convey the perceiver’s intuitive, direct apprehension of the “thing itself,” which would not be successfully grasped by a subject-oriented poetic practice. Particularly, it is the power of visualization that Hulme regards as most important:

[T]he creative activity of the artist is only necessary because of the limitations placed on internal and external perception by the necessities of action. If we could break through the veil which action interposes, if we could come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, art would be useless and unnecessary. Our eyes, aided by memory, would carve out in space and fix in time the most inimitable of pictures.⁴⁹

The “necessities of action” here may be understood as something akin to what Fry may have in his mind in his theorization of the practical vision: the need of social action always interferes and obscures our purely sensuous perception. They share the impulse to explore vision’s possibility to pierce the husk of familiar meanings attached to the object. However, the problem again lies in the different natures of visual art and literature. Ezra Pound proposes a definition of Imagist “image,” which is more aware that it cannot appeal to the eye straightforwardly: “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time . . . It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; the sense of freedom from time limits and space limits . . . ”⁵⁰ While Pound thus realizes that “image” is a metaphor, a complex entity made of thoughts and feeling, Hulme believes that the visual sense alone could make the poem achieve the liberation which both he and Pound desired: “This new verse appeals to the eye

⁴⁹ T. E. Hulme, Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art (London: Routledge, 1924) 147.

⁵⁰ Ezra Pound, Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954) 4.

rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes. The material . . . is image and not sound. It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured always to influence him.”⁵¹ Also, his list of the “ultimate attainments of poesy” in a letter to William Carlos Williams begins with “[t]o paint the thing as I see it.”⁵² His utmost trust in sight and his willingness to believe in the complete analogy between visual art and literature are remarkable. This can be explained by the fact that Hulme was a sculptor as well as a poet, but nonetheless, the same literary problem remains: as John T. Gage argues in In The Arresting Eye, even if the poem succeeds in describing the object just as the poet’s eye perceives it, the reader cannot have the actual “plastic image” like sculpture, and all that the poem can do is being a stimulus to lead the reader into a certain “mental image.”⁵³ Therefore, the imagists had to write a considerable amount of manifestos to educate the reader’s mind’s eye in advance so that their poems are read in the way the poets intended, and still, there is always an imbalance between their manifestoes and actual poetic practice. Gage quotes a passage from Howard Nemerov’s study on modernist poetry as a key to thinking about the relationship between the eye and the mind in modernism:

Modernism in writing is chiefly about . . . *seeing*, seeing as superior to

⁵¹ T. E. Hulme, Further Speculations, ed. Sam Hynes (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1955) 75. As for the centralization of vision in Hulme and Pound’s metaphorical use of it, see John T. Gage, In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981) 13-15.

⁵² Quoted in Peter Jones 16.

⁵³ Gage 72-73.

thinking, as opposed to thinking, and something the poet must do instead of thinking if necessary. One notes already the suspicion of a difficulty, that all this affirmation of the eye at the mind's expense is an operation carried out and a decision taken by the mind, not the eye.⁵⁴

It seems that this relationship is valid not only in poetry, but also in the novel. To see this point more clearly, now we turn to a scene from James Joyce's Stephen Hero,⁵⁵ which is generally identified as the origin of the modernist concept of epiphany.⁵⁶ Stephen as a young man aspiring to be an artist is talking to his friend Cranly about "epiphanizing" an object with the power of his gaze:

—Yes, said Stephen. I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany.

—What?

—Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised. It is just in this epiphany that I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty.⁵⁷

Struggling to establish his own theory of art, Stephen thinks that once it is set, the world would appear completely different and he can find unknown beauty even in mundane, trivial things; the object's hidden quality will be discovered by his genius. Although seemingly this epiphany admits the greatest importance to the spontaneous visual perception, the eye here is actually a "spiritual eye," a representative of the mind reaching out to external objects to try out the validity of its understanding of the world. The following remark of Stephen makes it more evident that the object in

⁵⁴ Quoted in Gage 90.

⁵⁵ James Joyce, Stephen Hero, ed. Theodore Spencer (NY: New Directions, 1963). This early draft of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man was included in the personal library of Joyce, which was left in Trieste to be taken care of by his brother he moved to Paris in 1920. The manuscript was first published under the title of Stephen Hero, edited by Theodore Spencer, in 1944, but this new edition, which came out in 1963, incorporates additional pages edited by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon.

⁵⁶ Beja 1.

⁵⁷ Stephen Hero 211.

question has already been well processed by the mind before it achieves the condition of epiphany. He refers to Thomas Aquinas's statement that the three things requisite for beauty are "integrity, a wholeness, symmetry and radiance." To apprehend a hypothetically beautiful object, the mind first divides the universe into the object in question and the rest to recognize its integrity; next it analyzes the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects; finally, Stephen says that, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, "we recognize that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany."⁵⁸ In this way, there are at least two analytical steps taken up by the mind before the epiphanic moment arrives. In short, here vision is still an ally of mind.

The above examples privilege the immediacy of visual perception as something cut off from the conventional state of mind, but they do not show the readiness to treat it as one of our physical senses as Woolf does, and alternatively invest it with intricately-woven new aesthetic theories. In their attempt to enhance sight's ability to understand the world by closing down its focal point on to one or a limited number of things, they rather seem to share more with Henry James. It is true that Joyce significantly explores other bodily senses in his later writings, as if to tease the idealistic rigidity of Stephen's aesthetics initially presented in Stephen

⁵⁸ Joyce 213.

Hero, and modernism generally has the tendency to foreground sense experience.⁵⁹ However, the point here is that, rather than trying to dismantle the mind's eye model itself, it seems that Joyce as well as most other modernist writers chooses to oppose its authority with other "counter-" sense perceptions without eroding the independence of sight's operation.

Stephen's theory of epiphany is crucially removed in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), but the concept of epiphany itself survives and appears in Dubliners (1914) as its main aesthetics. Many of them are characteristically related to sight and memory, but the most impressive of all may be the one in the last episode, "The Dead."⁶⁰ It is about a Christmas gathering held by two old maids, to which Gabriel and Gretta, the middle-aged husband and wife, attend. People dance, talk, laugh, and some make speeches—descriptions of ordinary scenes continue, until people start leaving. Suddenly, when he gazes up the staircase from the

⁵⁹ Stephen himself does not restrict the epiphanic moment only to visual experience. Just before the Ballast Office scene, he is talking about another epiphany caused by overheard words between a couple. He was passing by an impoverished area and saw a woman on the steps of "one of those brown brick houses which seem the very incarnation of Irish paralysis" and a man leaning on the rusty railings in conversation:

The Young Lady—(drawling discreetly) . . . O, yes . . . I was . . . at the . . .
cha . . . pel . . .
The Young Gentleman—(inaudibly) . . . I . . . (again inaudibly) . . . I . . .
The Young Lady—(softly) . . . O . . . but you're . . . ve . . . ry . . . wick . . . ed . . .
(210-11)

This ordinary flirtatious conversation has so much impact on Stephen as to make him compose a verse called "Villanelle of the Temptress." In his eyes the scene is the microcosm of Ireland's paralysis: the couple is not even aware of the British sovereign which has indirectly put them in such desolate vicinity, and continue the infertile courtship simply to reproduce people like them (if their relationship is adultery, the barrenness is more explicit). However, as I am going to argue below, such a use of oral epiphany is not intended to have the effect of cutting down the mind-eye connection itself.

⁶⁰ James Joyce, "The Dead," Dubliners (London: Penguin, 1996) 199-256.

dark hall, Gabriel is struck by the sight of his wife standing on the first flight:

There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter.⁶¹

This scene has similarities to James's use of a specific sight in a crucial scene in that the reader is later told that it is pregnant with some hidden truth. At the same time, strongly operating here is the male gaze, for Gabriel is blind to the true feeling of his wife—the song reminds her of her secret love story with Michael Furey, who practically died for her—and for a moment he idealizes his wife and feels the passion of their youth rushing back to him (that this passion is plain and carnal is put explicitly: he senses “a keen pang of lust” only to later laugh at his “idealizing his own clownish lust”).⁶² In this view, the scene also has much in common with the one from Middlemarch that we saw earlier in the first chapter: there the German painter presses his ideals on to the unmoving figure of Dorothea, which is soon followed by his more secular interest in her.⁶³ But here Joyce differs from James and Eliot in his introducing music to the scene: the truth is hidden in the song, which does not reach Gabriel's ear. It is loud enough only for Gretta, and this gap created in their auditory sense, the “distant music,” stands for truth in this story.

It is such a use of music, or more generally sound and orality, that

⁶¹ “The Dead” 240.

⁶² “The Dead” 246 and 251, respectively.

⁶³ See 60-62 of this dissertation.

Joyce develops in Ulysses (1922) through his complex linguistic experiment to the effect of relativizing sight's dominance, but here I would like to take up another example, in which yet another sense, the sense of touch, functions in an important way. The third episode begins with Stephen's inner monologue, "Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot."⁶⁴ Though it is much moderated from his initial theorization in Stephen Hero, Stephen's idea about vision is still that it is a locus where the viewing subject interprets and gives meanings to the viewed object. Accordingly, in this episode he freely imagines fictional stories about people coming and going on the beach. At the end, however, he suddenly acquires a sensation that *he* may be looked at by somebody:

He laid the dry snot picked from his nostril on a ledge of rock, carefully.
For the rest let look who will.

Behind. Perhaps there is someone.

He turned his face over a shoulder, rere regardant. Moving through the air
high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing,
upstream, silently moving, a silent ship.⁶⁵

Here Stephen is startled by the realization that he himself is one of the visible objects in the world, and this sensation is induced, though remotely, by the stimulus of touching his own body, his picking his nose. However, the next moment it disappears—he turns around, and all that he finds there is a silently sailing ship; in other words, he immediately retrieves his position as an observer looking upon the world, into which his awareness of

⁶⁴ James Joyce, Ulysses, annotated student edition (London: Penguin, 2000) 45.

⁶⁵ Ulysses 64.

his own body quickly dissolves. Focusing on this part, Toru Nakayama argues that in Ulysses, “the gaze of the world” which has the potential of making one realize his physical existence is never seized as itself, but only sensed through other sensible objects which distract one’s attention.⁶⁶ Nakayama thinks that Joyce’s concept of vision is in this sense close to Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea of gaze: it has the ideological nature to define the self, but is never visible itself except in the form of the *object* of gaze. In spite of his critique of vision in an unprecedented scale, Sartre’s assumption of the truly subjective self as transparent, pure consciousness in opposition to the opaque thingness of the object paradoxically shows the residue of Cartesian dualism in his argument,⁶⁷ and from the above examples one may say that Joyce’s visual consciousness stays with this Sartrean idea, rather than questioning the subject/object dichotomy in the operation of sight.⁶⁸

If we put Woolf’s venture alongside these examples from other texts, its novelty becomes more evident. Learning from but in the end outgrowing Fry’s Post-Impressionist aesthetics, she radically inquires into the simple but nonetheless overlooked point that vision is one of our physical senses, and that to see it as more closely connected to the mind than other is a discourse. She then uses this “body’s eye” metaphorically to illuminate so far neglected feminine psychology. The full signification of this ontology of

⁶⁶ Toru Nakayama, “The Textual Anamorphosis: The Modernist Aesthetics and Its Anti-Aesthetics of the Gaze,” eds. Fuhito Endo et al., The Revolving Modern: British Culture and Literature between Wars (Tokyo: Kenkyu-sha, 2008) 91-111.

⁶⁷ For the detail of Sartre’s critique of the ocular both in his philosophy and his novel Nausea (1938) and the remnant of Cartesianism in them, see Jay 263-328.

⁶⁸ Nakayama’s article examines that this is the case with not only Stephen but also Leopold Bloom. See Nakayama 102-6.

the visual developed by Woolf will be examined in the next chapter on To the Lighthouse (1928). In this novel, whose central protagonist is a female painter, one can see how Woolf develops her unique scheme into its prime, as well as the struggle fought by her and her heroine to overcome the epistemology of the Cartesian eye.

Chapter 5

“The Dancing, Rhythmical Movement of Her Brush”:

The Phenomenology of Sight in To the Lighthouse

In the previous chapter we have seen that, initially stimulated by Roger Fry’s aesthetics but later growing out of its influence, Virginia Woolf comes to stand against the Cartesian model of the eye, which tries to connect sight strongly to the mind’s intellectual activities. This is most clearly seen in the privileged moment called “the moment of being” in her writing, whose unique nature becomes unmistakable when compared with other modernist epiphanies. Her visual aesthetics is, however, not only innovative in comparison with other modernist texts but also carries the newness that would offer a way out of the impasse that the feminist anti-ocularcentrism much later stumbles into. Inspired by Sartre’s negative concept of vision and Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist response to it, feminism of the 1970s and 1980s emphatically highlights the dichotomy of male/female as the gazer/gazed, but this brings about the paradoxical effect of underlining the ideology and prevalence of the male gaze. Towards the late 1980s, therefore, feminism put forth more nuanced views about the usefulness of addressing embodiment in relation to visual experience and these largely grew out of Freudian or Lacanian models of vision. Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory is particularly fruitful with its view

of the body as the means by which gender is made manifest or visualized through social codes and interpretation.¹ Informed by phenomenological understanding, the body as the embodiment of a historical situation, Butler argues that gender is an act performed by each individual as a constituent of society, not a predetermined identity.² This positive account of the body—it is not a denigrated conceptual opponent to the mind in the Cartesian sense but is rather the real physical entity which meets and interacts with the world and embeds ideology in it—also reshapes the meaning of visibility. Woolf’s attempt to break through the mind-eye connection that has a long history in Western epistemology seems to have, in its anti-ocularcentric impulse, more closeness to this new ontology of the ocular than the feminist theorization of the male gaze. To see this point, this chapter turns to To the Lighthouse (1928) and examines how the text foregrounds the dualistic theorization of sight only to be dismantled by a new epistemology of the visual, which is very close to the idea of the embodied sight in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

The validity of reading To the Lighthouse in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy has already been demonstrated by Laura Doyle.³ In her article Doyle makes an important point generally about the relationship between phenomenology and modernism. The phenomenological reading of the modernist text with its emphasis on Bergsonian temporal flux and

¹ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (NY: Routledge, 1990).

² Butler explains her debt to phenomenology in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” Jones 392-402.

³ Laura Doyle, “‘These Emotions of the Body’: Intercorporeal Narrative in To the Lighthouse,” Twentieth Century Literature 40:1 (1994) 42-71.

simultaneity as elements of a fluid subjectivity became outdated after the deconstructionist's (especially Jacques Derrida's) critique of the transcendental assumptions in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Heidegger. Doyle claims the necessity of reconsidering another phenomenology, that of Merleau-Ponty, which can powerfully inform the contemporary debate with its focus on the body not as a conceptual opponent to the mind in the Cartesian sense but as the "real" physical entity which meets and interacts with the world and embeds ideology.⁴ Doyle then embarks on a feminist reading of the novel to elucidate its intercorporeal narrative strategies—how it addresses the absent maternal body of Mrs. Ramsay. Informed by Doyle's discussion, there have been several attempts to read To the Lighthouse alongside of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts.⁵ None of these, however, pays particular attention to the phenomenology of sight while some of them tend to explore the tactile or the taste as an alternative, more "embodied" sense. In what follows I will try to illuminate a new aspect in the relationship between the novel and

⁴ For her general argument on postmodern understanding of modernism in relation to phenomenology, see especially Doyle 44-46.

⁵ Louise Westling, "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World." New Literary History 30 (1999) 855-75. This article analyzes the likeness between Woolf's fiction and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as "the mark of cultural ecosystem influx" (857) and particularly focuses on "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse and Between the Acts. James Krausner, "Doubtful Arms and Phantom Limbs: Literary Portrayals of Embodied Grief." PMLA 119 (2004) 218-32. Krausner's argument starts with the scene of Mr. Ramsay stretching his arms to the late Mrs. Ramsay in "Time Passes" and emphasizes the insistence and immediacy of touch rather than sight in the process of our mourning. I have also found two PhD dissertations recently written on the topic of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and modernist literature, both of which contain chapters on Woolf. Kelly Elizabeth Sultzbach, "Embodied Modernism: The Flesh of the World in E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and A. H. Auden." Diss. U of Oregon, 2008. Web. 5 June 2010. This dissertation has a similar standpoint as Westling's argument and launches an ecophenomenological reading of modernist works. Another is Lisa Angelella, "Alimentary Modernism." Diss. U of Iowa, 2009. Web. 5 June 2010. As the title indicates, Angelella's thesis explores sensual encounters with foods in the modernist novel.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and show more clearly that sight can be as "embodied" as other senses in Woolf's writing.

5.1. "The Window": Mrs. Ramsay in the Painting

The first part of To the Lighthouse (1927), "The Window," can be thoroughly read as the gap between sight and knowledge, or, put in a different way, between what the male gaze sees and what the female heart knows. Immediately after the story begins, Woolf introduces an epiphanic moment experienced by a male character, which is marked with sight's dominance and a static nature. Compared to others staying at the Ramsays' summer house, Charles Tansley has a lower-class origin and behaves pompously in order to conceal his inferiority complex. But Mrs. Ramsay is a woman with a feminine impulse to have "the whole of the other sex under her protection" (TL 10) in appreciation of their "manly" effort in the social milieu. This maternal instinct of hers has softened Tansley's harsh, egoistic manners. Accompanying her to one of her regular visits to the poor in the village, he is overcome with reverence for her virtuous figure and suddenly feels the urge to tell her everything about himself. The revelatory moment comes when he sees her coming down from the staircase: "when, suddenly, in she came, stood for a moment silent . . . stood quite motionless for a moment against a picture of Queen Victoria wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter, and all at once he realised it was this: it was this: —she was the

most beautiful person he had ever seen" (TL 18).⁶ Tansley sees her as an embodiment of the Victorian angel in the house (this is almost mockingly suggested by the overlapping portrait of the Queen), and "for the first time in his life Charles Tansley felt an extraordinary pride" (TL 18-19). The scene has the implication that the life of an elitist male such as Tansley (he is a keen follower of Mr. Ramsay at the university) is based, whether directly or indirectly, on the self-sacrifice made by women like Mrs. Ramsay, and that her motionless, silent figure under his gaze, as if she is in a tableau, suggests that the feminine passivity involved in taking up such a position arises largely because of the lack of alternate choices in life.

"Mrs. Ramsay like a figure in the painting" is a motif repeated in "The Window." After the charity visit, she sits beside a window, reading to her son James and knitting socks for a child at the lighthouse. While his wife is thus engaged in domestic errands, Mr. Ramsay, the empiricist philosopher, is taking a stroll on the lawn, trying to solve his philosophical question: so far he has reached the "Q" stage, which itself is an achievement, but he longs to get to "R." In the middle of his intellectual struggle, the figure of his wife and son offers him a great consolation:

He stopped to light his pipe, looked once at his wife and son in the window,

⁶ First focusing on this scene, Janet Winston examines Mrs. Ramsay's Queen-like figure and the imperialist ideology of motherhood in the novel. Janet Winston, "Something Out of Harmony": *To the Lighthouse* and the Subject(s) of Empire," *Woolf Studies Annual* 2 (1996) 39-70. A viewpoint missing from her mostly persuasive, powerful argument may be that Mrs. Ramsay in this scene is seen through Tansley's eyes, not being depicted by the narrator in a more neutral way as Winston seems to presuppose (in her discussion Tansley is seen as a stand-in for the absent colonized subject, and this may explain why she does not really put into question the nature of his gaze full of admiration for Mrs. Ramsay). As I am going to discuss in the following part by featuring Mrs. Ramsay like a figure framed in the painting, there may be a dose of irony latent in this overlapping figures of her and the Queen.

and as one raises one's eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind. (TL 38-39)

He sees them as if he were a passenger on a train looking up to see a view from the window while reading; it does not really matter what he actually sees out there, as long as it is beautiful enough to be a few moments' escape from the world of the book. Similarly, in order to give Mr. Ramsay comfort and relief, his wife and son should belong to a different world from his intellectual inquiries. Framed in the window, and also framed in his gaze, here Mrs. Ramsay and James have lost their individualities to become a pleasant "illustration" of a mother and a son. It is not a neutral look but an ideological gaze that he is casting over them, for it certainly has the power to support his masculine pride: it reminds him of those who do not understand his thoughts but who have been fed by them, and so reassures him of the significance of his suffering and of "the energies of his splendid mind." Clearly, Mr. Ramsay's eye here is the mind's eye in the sense that it sees things in the way *his mind wants to see*. Thus fortified and satisfied, he goes back to his contemplation, but is soon seized by the fear that he will never reach "R" and his reputation will not last. Then he once more seeks an escape through the sight of his wife and child: "Who shall blame him? Who will not secretly rejoice when the hero puts his armour off, and halts by the window and gazes at his wife and son . . . who will blame him if he does homage to the beauty of the world?" (TL 41-42). Mr. Ramsay imagines himself as a mythic hero at rest, and again arrests their figures in the

frame of his mind's eye, which is symbolically represented as the pane of the drawing room window.

Mr. Bankes, Mr. Ramsay's old friend, also sees Mrs. Ramsay as antipathetic to the world of the male, and admires her for that very reason. Looking back at their past, he thinks that if Mr. Ramsay had not sought "the beauty of the world" and had concentrated on philosophy, he would have achieved something truly great. To feed his wife and eight children, Mr. Ramsay has dispersed considerable energy, and somehow lowered himself in desiring other people's praise so much. But at the same time Mr. Bankes, who is a widower without children, admits that the family has given his friend something that he himself does not have. While they are walking and talking about the Ramsays, Lily Briscoe notices that Mr. Bankes is admiringly looking at Mrs. Ramsay beyond, and thinks that he is in love with his friend's wife, but not quite in a personal way; rather it is "like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain" (TL 53). Mrs. Ramsay is adored for her universal virtue—her well-known beauty and domestic, feminine nature. Here, too, the novel employs the tropes of visual art in suggesting this. Having travelled a lot in Europe, Mr. Bankes is knowledgeable about painting, and his view of Mrs. Ramsay is often linked with the Renaissance painting of a mother and child, "objects of universal veneration" (TL 59).

Nonetheless, the narrative also describes Mr. Bankes as a man different from Mr. Ramsay and Tansley in that he also notices something

lying beneath her beauty—Mrs. Ramsay’s more independent personality, so to say: “if it was her beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing . . . and work it into the picture; or if one thought of her simply as a woman, one must endow her with some freak of idiosyncrasy” (TL 35). It is also in this scene that the narrator betrays some frustrated feelings about the “framing effect” of the male gaze cast over her: Mrs. Ramsay is “[k]nitting her reddish-brown hairy stocking, with her head outlined absurdly by the gilt frame, the green shawl which she had tossed over the edge of the frame, and the authenticated masterpiece by Michael Angelo” (TL 35). Perhaps for the first time, a critical point of view seems to slip into the narrative with the use of “absurdly.”

What Lily ventures to do with her brush is, then, bringing the “latent quivering thing” in Mrs. Ramsay to the visible sphere on her canvas. She is struggling with the prejudice against the female artist, and Charles Tansley’s poisonous words, “[w]omen can’t paint, women can’t write” (TL 54; 94) are resounding in her ear. The serious problem is that she cannot deny to herself that she is enchanted by the household of the Ramsays, whose harmony is mostly achieved by Mrs. Ramsay’s feminine considerations. Lily’s awkward position, caught between her ambition as an artist and the dominant idea of woman as the angel in the house, is given an expression in her difficulty in drawing things as she sees them. Putting up her easel on the front lawn, she is working on a picture of Mrs. Ramsay reading to James. She tries to distance herself both from the

Renaissance lifelikeness and the fashionable, Impressionist way of seeing “everything pale, elegant, semi-transparent” (TL 23). For her, “beneath the colour there was the shape” (TL 23), which the “creative vision” that Fry theorizes might find under the common look of things. But to see the shape is one thing, and to draw a picture of it is another:

She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see', and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. (TL 23-24)

This passage subtly pins down sight and knowledge disconnected within Lily. While she is capable of seeing things differently from the male characters, what she knows of the world does not match her psychological vision. The society that she lives in admits no value in it, and does not offer satisfactory knowledge to articulate it. A thousand forces push her to fling herself at Mrs. Ramsay's knee and to say “I'm in love with this all” (TL 24): as the lady secretly nurtures the idea in her heart, Lily might be able to develop her friendship with Mr. Bankes into something of a different nature and join the party of married women.

It is under this formidable tension that she is trying to paint, and this can be thought of in relation to one of the questions left unsolved by formalist aesthetics: the contradiction between “finding” and “making.” Even within the same text, Bloomsbury formalism is often found wavering between claiming, on one hand, that artists “find” significant form in the real world and instinctively record it, and, on the other hand, that

significant form is individually “made” by artists as a testament to talent and an embodiment of personality. This ambiguity suggests that formalism's primary concern was the development of a theory of aesthetic response rather than artistic creation.⁷ Focusing on Lily's creative process, the novel links this problem to its feminist concerns and rewrites it as follows: a female painter has found the form, but does not know how to make it into a picture.⁸ To the Lighthouse can be read as rumination on the artistic talent of a woman and of the world that is unsympathetic toward it, a topic on which Woolf's contemporary male formalists did not linger. Lily's strife may be, in this view, directly connected to the author's own. It reflects Woolf's ambition to exercise a mode of seeing other than the empirical that supplies materials for realist writing. Her attempt to reveal the problematics latent in the seemingly happy marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, which the fiction of earlier decades would not have been able to illuminate, proceeds hand in hand with Lily's attempt to give an expression to what she sees beneath the appearance of things. In this respect, what the novel is trying to do is quite different from the determinations of formalist aesthetics: it is not looking for a form detached from our mundane reality, but trying to find a form that can be expressed in and through it.

Woolf's critique of the male gaze is particularly foregrounded when

⁷ Reed 31.

⁸ Of course this is relevant to the problem of how the form engenders profound emotion, which we have looked at in the previous chapter. While Fry tries to explain it from the viewer's side, Woolf captures how the artist's emotion brings forth the form. This will be examined in more detail in the latter half of this chapter on the third part of the novel.

the text approaches closest to Mrs. Ramsay's inner self. After she has sent her younger children to bed, she is knitting in the drawing room alone and silent, attempting alone to be herself. At such moments "one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (TL 69). She imagines one human being as a limitlessly spreading, unfathomable darkness, and thinks that what we see each other by is just the tip of an iceberg. But if the large part of ourselves is invisible, how can the novel, before the problem of painting comes in, give a shape to it verbally? Something describable is needed, and Woolf chooses the least substantial possible yet still visible thing: the light from the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay looks up from the stocking and meets the strokes of the light. For her, the third one always seems to be hers. Often she finds herself "sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looks at—that light for example" (TL 70). The core of darkness bathing in light—one cannot possibly think of an expression less suitable for realistic representation, but it nonetheless keeps off mysticism or idealism in maintaining the connection with worldly substances. The ongoing mode of seeing is seriously put into question with the extremely subtle metaphor such as "[when she meets the third stroke, it is like] her own eyes meeting her own eyes" (TL 70). Suggesting that if there can be a moment illuminating her truthful being, it is attained by her own gaze, the text precludes the possibility of its being fully exposed to others. Here the distance between the viewing subject and the viewed object, which makes observation possible, is collapsed, and what is

presented is the intensely private universe where one's eye, so to speak, adheres to one's own eye, forgetting everything beyond that point.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that Lily's attempt is doomed to be a failure from the beginning. A revelatory moment that she herself goes through in "The Window" offers a key to understand the peculiar nature of Woolfian visual aesthetics, though the reader has to wait until the final part to witness the completion of the painting. Weary of her difficulty, Lily takes a stroll around the garden with Mr. Bankes. First they talk about the Ramsays and Mr. Ramsay's work, and among the branches of a tree, Lily sees an imaginary picture of his work that she has created herself:

Whenever she 'thought of his work' she always saw clearly before her a large kitchen table. It was Andrew's doing. She asked him what his father's books were about. 'Subject and object and the nature of reality,' Andrew had said. And when she said Heavens, she had no notion what that meant, 'Think of a kitchen table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there.' (TL 28)

Here we come across the same philosophical concern as the one we looked at in the introduction: the epistemological dualism that admits reality to both our subjective experience of the world and the world of objects not processed by human consciousness.⁹ The invisible kitchen table signifies the reality of an object when no one looks at it, and for Lily, it has become a symbol of Mr. Ramsay's intellect that can handle such abstract ideas. This "phantom kitchen table . . . whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity" (TL 28) can be then seen as a counterpart of the window: their square shape suggests the intellect of Mr. Ramsay, which

⁹ Taking the title from this part of the novel, Ann Banfield's The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) analyzes the influence of Bertrand Russell's philosophical realism, rather than that of Moore, on Woolf.

is the object of admiration from the female, but at the same time, whose lack of flexibility and rigorous emotional demand has a suffocating effect on them. If one passes day after day in “this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings” (TL 28), Lily thinks, no wonder that one might become quite different from an ordinary person.

In contrast to this static mental picture, Lily’s epiphanic moment that follows soon after is marked with its kinetic nature:

Suddenly, as if the movement of his hand had released it, the load of her accumulated impressions of him tilted up, and down poured in a ponderous avalanche all she felt about him. That was one sensation. Then up rose in a fume the essence of his being. That was another. She felt herself transfixed by the intensity of her perception; it was his severity; his goodness. I respect you (she addressed him silently) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal; you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the finest human being that I know; you have neither wife nor child (without any sexual feeling, she longed to cherish that loneliness) . . . (TL 28-29)

An intense moment is brought about by the animated movement of the human body, Mr. Bankes’ arm in this case. Also, expressions such as “a ponderous avalanche” and “a fume” ingeniously produce the impression that it is received by Lily’s whole body.¹⁰ From their conversation, now Lily

¹⁰ “Avalanche” is the word that Woolf uses in “Sketch of the Past,” in which she originally talks about her notion of moments of being. Among the several moments that she recalls, there is one that happened to her in the bath. One day little Virginia was frightened by an idiot boy, and in the evening she remembered that experience in bath:

[It was] as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off, so that I huddled up at my end of the bath, motionless. I could not explain it; I said nothing even to Nessa sponging herself at the other end. (*Moments of Being* 78)

The expressions such as “some sledge-hammer blow” and “avalanche” suggest the physical nature of the shock, which is all the more emphasized by her nakedness. This scene is also eloquent in telling us that such a moment is always strongly linked to the problem of articulation: the encounter with the idiot boy has “a whole avalanche of meaning,” but the little Virginia is not acquainted with the language to comprehend it, and cannot share the experience with her sister nearby. (There is a possibility that the experience was something sexual, and works for Virginia as a kind of primal scene.)

realizes that Mr. Bankes has a more pliable, independent mind than a Mr. Ramsay or a Tansley type, who is always demanding female sympathy and submission. With a person like him, there might be a new relationship between man and woman, which does not necessarily lead to “sexual feeling” and a marriage (Lily suspects that Mrs. Ramsay has hopes for her marrying Mr. Bankes in her heart). Compared to Tansley’s static, “visual” epiphany as well as the unmoving feature of Mrs. Ramsay framed in the window, this scene is very different in its strategy of representation as well as its social implications.

The next moment, then, there comes into focus an object onto which she entrusts this extreme sensation: she is “[s]tanding now, apparently transfixed, by the pear tree, impressions poured in upon her of those two men” (TL 29). The pear tree itself has no internal meaning, but it seems to be chosen as a sort of “peg” of emotion simply because it is there, beside them. The use of such an object seems to be another tactic of Woolf for bringing forth the invisible emotion to the visible surface, and here I would like to focus on this mediatory object in her moment of being, which was not discussed in the last chapter. Jeanne Schulkind points out a similarity between the moment of being and epiphany in Joyce as follows:

Such a moment for Virginia Woolf is one of recognition and then revelation—the value of which is independent of the object that is the catalyst—and, as such, is very close to Joyce’s notion of epiphany. One is reminded of the young Stephen Daedalus solemnly telling his friend Cranly ‘that the clock of the Ballast office is capable of epiphany.’¹¹

Certainly the pear tree works as a “catalyst” for Lily’s emotion, but in my

¹¹ Jeanne Schulkind, introduction, The Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings by Virginia Woolf (London: Chatto, 1976) 19.

view, it functions in a more intricate way than in Joyce. As we have already seen, Stephen in the Ballast Office scene is examining the validity of his art theory. Sight travels as the representative of his mind, and if his theory is good enough, it finds beauty even in a mundane thing. No matter whether Stephen realizes this in reality or not, the clock here has little value of its own: it is not more than an external material to try out the eligibility of his idea. The catalytic object in Woolf seems to carry more independence than this: it is there not exactly to give an assurance to what lies in the character's mind.

It seems that, to her use of the catalytic object, Woolf applies the influence of epistemological dualism in a way that benefits her feminist concerns. Since the new epistemology assumes that the object can exist independently of the human mind, by bringing in an inanimate object seemingly irrelevant to the character's emotion, Woolf can present the impact of a revelatory moment on a female character without fully explaining it. In this sense, the catalyst in her moments of being is given a function essentially the same as the mixing up of sight and other senses in them: it is a device to give a shape to the female psychic process that eludes the male gaze and the existing linguistic habit. The passage that follows the pear tree scene makes this point clearer: "to follow her thought was like following a voice which speaks too quickly to be taken down by one's pencil, and the voice was her own voice saying without prompting undeniable, everlasting, contradictory things, so that even the fissures and humps on the bark of the pear tree were irrevocably fixed there for eternity" (TL 29).

The thoughts surging up and down in Lily are so intense and private that it cannot be put into ordinary expressions—it is like a voice speaking too fast for a (novelist’s) pencil to write down. But still, it can be made effable if it is outlined by arbitrary chosen external objects such as the fissures and the humps of the pear tree; they are chosen exactly because they have nothing directly to do with Lily’s feelings and therefore have least risk of “symbolizing” them in any ordinary way and reducing the newness of her idea. With them, what is in her mind is made recordable, including things contradictory to each other, and precisely because it remains at this “semi-prelinguistic” stage, it is everlasting, trying to find suitable expressions forever.

Actually, such a catalyst is quite frequently found in the crucial scene in Woolf’s writing. For example, we find a very similar use of a tree in “Sketch of the Past.” One night at St. Ives, little Virginia overheard the suicide of a person who had been living in the vicinity. The shock somehow became linked to an apple tree in her garden: “The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy’s suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark—it was a moonlit night—in a trance of horror.”¹² The tree itself has no significance here, but it works as a sort of prop, gathering up the emotion too strong to put into words. Perhaps the tree is an object particularly preferred by Woolf and is often employed to have the effect of

¹² Moments of Being 84.

unifying amorphous feelings in her writing.¹³ The famous expression, “the rod in the cotton-wool,” that she uses when she originally make a distinction between the moments of “non-being” and “being” in the same “Sketches of the Past” can be also seen in the same light.¹⁴ The pin in “The Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’” may carry a similar function. Its presence is given no definite meaning, and the reader may wonder why it appears in the subtitle. But the pin, with the carnation as its counterpart, is important because it is described in a way which does not really incite any clear associated ideas; therefore, it can mean anything that the reader chooses to imagine.¹⁵ This is applicable to the lighthouse in To the Lighthouse, too. To Fry’s suggestion that the characters’ arriving there has some symbolic meanings, Woolf replied:

I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions—which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can’t manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalized way.¹⁶

To give the lighthouse some definite meanings and make it a symbol is to rely on the conventional use of language at least to some extent. By meaning nothing by it but treating it as a “catalyst,” a structural necessity to be a “deposit” of all types of emotion, Woolf adds a new weapon to her visual strategy in her verbal medium. In such a conceptualization of the

¹³ For example, the oak tree in Orlando (1928) has the function of uniting everything, transcending the difference in age and gender.

¹⁴ Moments of Being 83-87.

¹⁵ In the last chapter I attempted a feminist reading of it, but it was not meant to exclude other interpretations. It may be true that, following Beja, in Woolf’s writing the intense moments themselves count much more than the meanings they involve, and the experience of revelation matters rather than what is revealed. See Beja 114-15.

¹⁶ Hermione Lee, introduction, To the Lighthouse, by Virginia Woolf, ix-xliii at xxi-xxii.

external object, we may be able to trace how contemporary philosophers' struggle to think about the world without fully encroaching upon it with our consciousness stimulated Woolf's literary imagination.

So far we have seen Woolf's critique of the male gaze and the alternative moment of being with physical sensation and the catalytic object. This does not, however, straightforwardly lead to the completion of Lily's painting in "The Window." Lily's mental picture after her "moment" shows that she is still attracted by the world dominated by the male intellect: "in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind" (TL 30). Her admiration for the male corresponds with the inferiority that she feels at the dinner table that evening. Now Mrs. Ramsay looks rather triumphant since her plot of matching Paul Rayley and Minta has been realized. Two more people are about to join the herd of married people, and Minta glows with the happiness and pride of an engaged girl. Lily feels not a little unsettled in front of them, but she is quietly reflecting on her work: "In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space" (TL 92). It is not easy to identify which tree she means here. It could be the tree bending near Mrs. Ramsay's window (TL 53), or one of the elms, toward which Jasper fired his air-gun.¹⁷ But it may not be

¹⁷ These may be the same tree after all. In "The Central Line down the Middle of To the Lighthouse," Contemporary Literature 21.3 (1980) 363-82, Henry R. Harrington undertakes to draw a plate of Lily's picture guessed from the verbal description, admitting that "any attempt to read To the Lighthouse is bound to be frustrated by the sense that we gaze on the back of Lily's canvases" (364-65).

so unreasonable to guess that she bears in her mind the pear tree as a token of her friendship with Mr. Bankes. By concentrating her mind on the tree and her own creative activity, she is able to resist pitying Mr. Bankes and also therefore to evade the conventional marriage plot that Mrs. Ramsay wishes for her. Nevertheless, later in “The Lighthouse,” we are told that this solution was not enough: after ten years she is reminded of the painting as the one she never finished. Why is the idea of moving the tree conceived in “the moment of revelation” (TL 161) not sufficient? One possible answer is that, as long as Mrs. Ramsay is sitting at the window, her figure, framed in the ideal of domesticity, keeps Lily’s vision from developing into an actual picture. The next day she will be sitting there just as the day before, and her male admirers will continue to arrest her in their gaze. Mr. Ramsay will be strolling in the garden, wondering whether he can get to the “R” stage some day. The possibility of a new relationship between man and woman that Lily so narrowly caught a glimpse of is still too feeble to overturn the dominant discourse, and it is not until the object of the gaze is removed—ironically, this means not until Mrs. Ramsay is dead—that Lily successfully transfers her vision onto her canvas.

5.2. “Time Passes”: An Allegory of the Narrator

The following “Time Passes” section is a highly experimental, “eyeless” part. All lamps are extinguished at the Ramsays’, and everything is swallowed up in darkness. Time goes by, and in a parenthesis, we are

briefly told that one night Mrs. Ramsay died suddenly. Since then, the family have stopped coming to the cottage, and the narrative relates the years that have passed inside and outside the empty house. Two more parentheses report the deaths of Prue and Andrew in wartime. The eye seeing things in this part is no one's eye; it is close to the "enormous eye" as the only nerve to see, but more completely impersonal in the sense that there is no owner indicated.¹⁸ In this world with nobody, the correspondence between the human mind and nature is lost ("the mirror was broken" [TL 146]); trees and flowers are "looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible" (TL 147). With no living eye to perceive it, nature exists and mutates independently from humanity (in this idea, one may find more explicit influence of the epistemological dualism on Woolf than in her use of catalyst).

Also, the mirror hanging in the empty room seems to have an interesting function. The narrative mentions it a couple of times: "how once the looking-glass had held a face" (TL 141); Mrs. McNab the caretaker is "[r]ubbing the glass of the long looking-glass . . ." (TL 142); "Suppose the house were sold (she [Mrs. McNab] stood arms akimbo in front of the looking-glass) it would want seeing to—it would" (TL 147). This mirror can be taken as a reification of the realist narrator, who is simultaneously standing inside/outside the story. In Realism and Consensus in the English Novel, Ermarth explains this impossible state by drawing on a pictorial

¹⁸ It can be said that the time itself becomes a character with a featureless face, gazing upon the world. See Gillespie, The Sister's Arts 176.

analogue. In Diego Velázquez's Las Meninas (1656),¹⁹ we find a small, square mirror behind, on which the figures of the king and the queen are shown. Although they are supposedly “outside” the painting, their reflection in the mirror also places them



“inside” the pictorial space.²⁰ According to Ermarth, the narrator’s position in realist fiction is close to this mirror called “Point A” in Las Meninas: it is not a natural point of view in the world, but “a collective result, a specifier of consensus.”²¹ The narrator is not individual, not corporeal, but nonetheless resides inside the text. The looking-glass in “Time Passes” represents this position of the narrator taking an exterior form. When the text is evacuated of the character, there is still a narrator standing in the middle, describing the world; as if to correspond to this, the mirror, which should normally hold people’s faces, does not have anyone to look in it (Mrs. McNab never does so since she is, quite significantly, squint-eyed), but continues to reflect the world.

“Time Passes” thus sums up Woolf’s longstanding concern with the realist narrator, getting to the bare core of it in no man’s land. In this view, the “Time Passes” section itself is like the mirror located in the middle of her fictional world. However, it is an experiment which Woolf would not repeat again: once the core, the naked state of the narrator, is revealed, she

¹⁹ Diego Velázquez, Las Meninas, 1656, The National Prado Museum Online Gallery, Web. 12 Dec. 2009.

²⁰ Ermarth 68-69.

²¹ Ermarth 66.

brings back her characters. The war has ended, and the Ramsays and their friends get together at the cottage after ten years' interval. With them, the human eye is recovered. Lily is back, too, and this second part comes to its end with this statement: "Her eyes wide open. Here she was again, she thought, sitting bolt upright in bed. Awake" (TL 155).

5.3. "The Lighthouse": The Phenomenology of Sight

The final part begins with Lily's elegiac question, "What does it mean then, what can it all mean? . . . Nothing, nothing—nothing she could express at all" (TL 159). Her feeling of helplessness in the face of the war and the inescapable work of time and death is but soon replaced by a creative impulse—she should finish the painting she never did ten years ago. But this time again, the now widowed Mr. Ramsay disturbs her in a strangely emotional way. He is pacing up and down nearby, demanding female sympathy. Now that Mrs. Ramsay is gone, Lily senses all the pressure on her, and it has the effect of suspending her brush in the air. However, relief comes from an unexpected source: Mr. Ramsay's boots. She notices that he wears a splendid pair, and, to her surprise, Mr. Ramsay responds in good spirits and they have a very ordinary conversation about boots—how hard it is to find a place where they are made properly, how Mr. Ramsay spent his youthful days to find such a place, and how fine the leather they used for his current pair—until they reached "the blessed island of good boots" (TL 168). Although Lily's joy at this small

conversation looks overemphasized, in fact it has more significance than it appears: here, almost for the first time in the novel, *an object is looked at as it is*. A pair of boots is a substance that man puts on for walking, and it should be made good enough for that purpose. An object is talked about in terms of its role in daily life, not of the abstract question such as “subject and object and the nature of reality.” This boots episode more or less disarms the theory of the catalyst, too: here is no excess of language or emotion that we saw in the pear tree scene. What happens between Mr. Ramsay and Lily is tersely reported in a succession of short sentences, and the boots are treated as boots till the end without an excess of disproportionate emotion. The pear tree could stand for the ineffable, but it is at the same time a tree on which pears grow; the phantom table may exist in one’s mind, but the real kitchen table is where foods are prepared. With this realization, Lily is moved to tears, suddenly filled with sympathy for Mr. Ramsay. Her eyes are opened to the fact that he is, after all, a common individual as she is. She has been always thinking of him with the images she has created herself: “a tyrant” spoilt by his wife (TL 29), a phantom kitchen table as a symbol of his intellect (TL 30), and now “a king in exile” (TL 162). Besides his philosophical concerns, he does care for quite ordinary things such as how one’s boots should fit one’s feet and how the knot should be made. Both aspects are Mr. Ramsay’s, and now Lily is able to see him directly as he is: an old widower suffering from loneliness and the approaching old age. The talk about the boots has the effect of expelling all complex thoughts about the object launched in “The Window,” and once

again opens our eyes to the object in the real, daily life.

To see the object in this way is of course different from realizing that the external world can exist completely independent of human subjectivity. While “The Window” and “Time Passes” incessantly drew our attention to the split between the subjective perception of an object and its objective reality (this includes the gap between one’s opinion of a person and what he/she really is), “The Lighthouse” allows more interaction between them and moves toward their unification. From the beginning, the treatment of the lighthouse is radically different: it no longer stands for something remote, elusive, and mysterious. It is a place where Mr. Ramsay goes to this morning with two of his children; it is where the lighthouse-keeper’s family, who may be in need of some material aid, are living. After such lengthy contemplation on it, the reader may feel a kind of refreshing shock to be introduced to *this* lighthouse—the lighthouse as it really is. Correspondingly, the characters too are upset about the outing: Nancy the eldest child “burst in, and asked, looking round the room, in a queer half dazed, half desperate way, ‘What does one send to the Lighthouse?’ as if she were forcing herself to do what she despaired of ever being able to do” (TL 159). Suddenly, the lighthouse has become a reality, and Lily thinks:

What does one send to the Lighthouse indeed! At any other time Lily could have suggested reasonably tea, tobacco, newspapers. But this morning everything seemed so extraordinarily queer that a question like Nancy’s—What does one send to the Lighthouse?—opened doors in one’s mind that went banging and swinging to and fro and made one keep asking, in a stupefied gape, What does one send? What does one do? Why is one sitting here after all? (TL 160)

After a decade of war and death, after the inhuman world of “Time Passes,”

the text switches back to life again, and people have to think at the level of daily commodities as well as at the existential level—why does one go on living after all these years of loss and sorrow? Mr. Ramsay’s going to the lighthouse should be read as an attempt to find the answer to all of these questions. A journey to the place which was first discussed with his wife a decade ago is a tribute to the memory of Mrs. Ramsay; he goes as a widower and a father of their children, rather than as a philosopher, with his splendid boots on. The episode of boots both literally and figuratively draws the characters and the reader down to the earth, to the world in which we actually inhabit and move around.

This view of the object in “The Lighthouse” is very close to Heidegger’s concept of “serviceability” that he puts forward in “The Origin of the Work of Art.”²² In this essay Heidegger contends that the artwork belongs to the realm which is opened up by itself, where there is a disclosure, a happening of truth. The “serviceability” of the object is a part of the truth thus disclosed. It is conceptualized as a mediating determinant of how the object’s form is made of matter:

The interfusion of form and matter prevailing here is, moreover, controlled beforehand by the purpose served by pitcher, axe, shoes. Such serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*] is never assigned or added on afterward to an entity of the type of a pitcher, ax, or pair of shoes. But also it is not something that floats somewhere above it as an end.²³

Serviceability is the purpose served by the product in our everyday life; then Heidegger especially focuses on a pair of peasant shoes in relation to

²² Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger, eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (NY: Modern Library, 1964) 647-701.

²³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” 658.

the visual art. He thinks that the shoes are for the first time what they are when the peasant woman wears them in the field. They are all the more genuinely so the less she thinks about them, sees them, or pays attention to them: “She stands and walks in them. This is how shoes actually serve.”²⁴ But it is only when they are drawn in the picture that we perceive all this. While the real peasant woman simply puts them on, in the work of art—here Van Gogh’s A Pair of Shoes (1886),²⁵ which presumably Woolf was also familiar with, is taken up—their serviceability is condensed and transfixed on the canvas:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth* and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself risers to its resting-in-self.²⁶

The vocabulary with which Heidegger tries to pin down the emergence of essential Being is what we saw in his theory of Enframing (there the expressions such as “turning,” “clearing,” and “sudden self-lightening” are used). It seems that the above description of Van Gogh’s work, too, is meant to incite an image as kinetic as possible (see especially the underlined expressions). Heidegger’s phenomenology, in general, features the state before the division between subject and object occurs, and this basic

²⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” 662.

²⁵ Vincent van Gogh, A Pair of Shoes, 1886, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Permanent Collection, Web. 15 Dec. 2009.

²⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” 663, emphasis added.

attitude is reflected in this essay, too: in his idea of serviceability (which molds both matter and form), the shoes and the peasant woman at one with each other in the field, and the “oneness” standing forth from the canvas and appealing to the viewing subject.



A Pair of Shoes (1886)

Nevertheless, Heidegger’s view of the painting is seemingly not innovative enough for scrutinizing Lily’s creation in the final part of To the Lighthouse. Although the treatment of the object shows many similarities to Heidegger’s “serviceability” and, as we are going to see, it is indeed a “happening,” a disclosure, that Woolf tries to capture through Lily’s drawing, the “truth” that Woolf brings forth here is of a somewhat different nature from Heidegger’s view of art. To begin with, Van Gogh is an Impressionist, and his work, still relatively faithful to the object’s appearance, is probably not what Lily aims for: ten years ago, she already thought that it was not honest to her vision to adapt the Impressionist technique (TL 23). In Jacob’s Room, Van Gogh’s A Pair of Shoes is indeed a key painting. As Sue Roe suggests in her introduction, Woolf may have had it in her mind in the last scene, where Mrs. Flanders holds up Jacob’s boots,

and it is probably the reproduction of it that Jacob has in his college room (JR xxxvii-xxxix). Jacob's Room is a novel more concerned with the appearance of things than To the Lighthouse in the sense that it still holds the expectation that, from time to time, some personal truth would be burnt into the eye as a strong visual impression. On the other hand, Lily's painting is meant to grasp the essence of Mrs. Ramsay released from the dominance of the male gaze, which is complicit with realist writing and language, and therefore should keep more distance from the world on the surface. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, do we not detect the male gaze operating strongly in Heidegger's reading of a Gogh? His choice of a woman as a wearer of the shoes is arbitrary (there is nothing to indicate gender in the real painting), and his linking up the woman, the peasant life, harvest, birth and death, and the earth is a typical manifestation of the myth of the mother earth.²⁷ As we will be discussing below, in "The Lighthouse" too, the absent maternal body of Mrs. Ramsay is constantly imagined; but it does not end there and that absence is combated with the lively movement of another female body, that is, Lily the painter's. While Heidegger's view is concerned with the painting and the viewer and completely excludes the painter's body from consideration, To the Lighthouse focuses on the artist herself looking at the world, and by doing so, points toward a truth that is not lightened up in Heidegger's

²⁷ Meyer Schapiro claims that the Van Gogh boots represented are not really peasant boots but those of Van Gogh himself, a detail that would negate Heidegger's reading of the importance of the shoes' purpose inferred from the visual. Problems with both Heidegger and Schapiro's reading are discussed at length in Jacques Derrida, "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*pointure*]," The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 255-382.

theory.

When we think about the artist's body in creation, it is a phenomenology other than Heidegger's that comes to help us—that of Merleau-Ponty. The idiosyncrasies of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy lie in its renunciation of the distinction between subject and object, with the body as a point where they merge. In his main work Phenomenology of Perception (1945), he criticized both empiricist and idealist traditions in philosophy, saying that neither of them is concerned with the actual phenomenon of perception. The former assumes that sensations are produced exclusively by the outside stimuli on the subject as a passive receptive apparatus, and turns the subject into an object like all others in the world. On the other hand, the latter makes the cognitive subject so powerful that perception is turned into a mere function of thought. Science is diagnosed as equally deficient since it deals with the world after the separation of the subject and the object has already happened. Merleau-Ponty contends that his phenomenology aims to “reawaken” our basic, bodily experience antecedent to any conscious thought of it.

In his attempt to articulate this physical perception, sight is taken up as the first example to show the inadequacy of conceptualizing the objective thought of the world. At the beginning of “The Body,” part one of Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty describes the act of seeing an object. What really happens is “either to have it on the fringe of the visual field and be able to concentrate on it, or else respond to this summons by

actually concentrating upon it.”²⁸ The two operations do not coincide because of the physiological mechanism of the eye. Therefore, to gaze on an object means that the eye focuses on it and all the rest recedes into the background horizon. When we put, for example, a house under our gaze, we know that the same house looks differently from other angles, but we cannot take into consideration all the angles taken by everything else in the world. Similarly, we can imagine how it looked or will look like in the near past or future, but the remoter past or future, with certain changes in the surrounding and different views of the house from each of the change, is simply beyond our guess. If an absolutely objective thought of an object can be made, it should include all these perspectives, but it is apparently impossible.²⁹ Merleau-Ponty thinks that this is the very reason why we form the “idea” of an object in our mind since it cannot be built up anywhere else. At the moment we conceive the objective thought of an object, we lose contact with the actual perception. What is clear from this example of a house is that Merleau-Ponty’s is a world where everything is related and there is no autonomous being. Human being is no exception: our body is no more than one of the objects located in this all-related universe. It is from this standpoint that he advances a new ontology of the ocular:

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002) 78. For the introductory section on visual perception that follows, see 77-83. All the citation from this work will be hereafter shown in the parenthesis, with the abbreviation PP.

²⁹ The similar idea appears in To the Lighthouse, in relation to Mrs. Ramsay’s famous beauty. Lily thinks, “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty” (TL 214).

I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world. My recent awareness of my gaze as a means of knowledge I now repress, and treat my eyes as bits of matter. They then take their place in the same objective space in which I am trying to situate the external object and I believe that I am producing the perceived perspective by the projection of the object on my retina. (PP 81)

These are Merleau-Ponty's farewell to the Cartesian eye. For him, the eyes are of the body, and our visual field changes according to the position that our body occupies in space and time. The eye can never enjoy the privilege of the spectatorial position as it is inescapably buried in the flesh and stands in the same space as all the rest of the world. Collapsing the distance between the viewing eye and the viewed object, Merleau-Ponty dismisses the idea of vision as the source of objective knowledge—it is an illusory production of Cartesian dualism. In the following part, I would like to read the last part of To the Lighthouse alongside Merleau-Ponty's thoughts, for the epistemology and the visual strategy explored by Woolf here seems to have so much in common with them. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty privileges the painter, above all Paul Cézanne, thinking that his or her presence is an indicator of actual visual perception, and this also enables us to understand the full implication of Lily's creation in "The Lighthouse."

"Eye and Mind" (1961) is the last article Merleau-Ponty published before his untimely death in the same year, and it is thought to be a preliminary statement of the ideas that would have been developed in The Visible and the Invisible, which is left fragmentary. It opens with his critique of science and his theory of the body standing in the middle of the all-associated universe as a true locus of Being. Then he says that only the

painter can really show us this state of the viewer immersed in the world that he sees. First of all—Merleau-Ponty begins his theory of the visual art with what may sound a truism—the painter paints with his body: “Indeed we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. . . [It is] not the body as a chunk of space or bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.”³⁰ It is the body that makes differences in the visual field, being a part of it, and vision without movement is simply inconceivable. The eye always goes with the body: “The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being.”³¹ Once we recognize this overlapping of vision and the mobile body, it forbids us to conceive vision separately in relation to the mind.

Lily in the last section testifies to this inseparability of vision and the body remarkably well. Regretting that she did not give Mr. Ramsay some sympathetic words (he departed soon after their conversation on the boots), she turns to her canvas with the newborn sensation inside her. The text features the mobile nature of her creation:

With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it—a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related . . . (TL 172)

There was no such scene in “The Window”: the narrative was caught

³⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” ed. Thomas Baldwin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings (London: Routledge, 2004) 290-324 at 294.

³¹ “Eye and Mind” 294.

between the sight of Mrs. Ramsay framed in the window and Lily's inner struggle as a female artist, and never really focused on what she was doing with her canvas and brush. But now, her vision expresses itself through her body—painting cannot be done unless the painter takes his/her body with him/her, and what we see on the canvas is the result of this indubitable but often neglected coalition of vision and the body. The impulse for creation surging up within Lily is also described in highly physical terms: "For the mass loomed before her; it protruded; she felt it pressing on her eyeballs. Then, as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted, she began precariously dipping among the blues and ambers, moving her brush hither and thither . . ." (TL 173-74). Furthermore, now the shift of the narrative point of view is entirely subject to the change of Lily's position. After painting a while, she moves toward the edge of the lawn to see if she can see Mr. Ramsay and his children setting out to the sea. A boat is drifting apart from others and she decides that it is theirs. The next moment the narrative switches to the scene on the boat, which takes the whole of the next chapter, then switches back again to Lily's thought at the beginning of chapter five, "Yes, that is their boat" (TL 185). This happens again between chapter seven and eight (TL 198). Actually, the whole of "The Lighthouse," except the first two sections, consists of the alternate scenes on the Ramsays' lawn and on the sea, and this change thoroughly depends on Lily's eye—its movement to focus on near and far in turn.

By saying that vision and the body are inseparable, of course

Merleau-Ponty does not banish the mind's work from the scene where a picture is drawn. We should go back to the pre-Cartesian stage and once again understand sight as physical, but the fact remains that the painter assesses things on view by his mind. What makes him different from others is his ability to see the world differently with his artistic talent, and this is the very reason why the painter "*while he is painting*, practices a magical theory of vision."³² Two things are happening at the same time: while the objects enter into his visual field, his mind goes out through the eyes to meet them. It is because he is looking for something inside him out there in the world that so many painters have said that things look at them at the crucial moment. For him, certain objects seem to emanate some meaning from within. Therefore, the painter in artistic activity is in a unique state: he is at one with the world in which he is working but simultaneously apart from it in the sense that he "never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them."³³ In this way, broadly speaking, Merleau-Ponty does not completely banish "the mind's eye" from the work of our vision: when we look upon the world, we do so with some thoughts in our mind. The novelty of Merleau-Ponty's argument lies in that he designates the painter's body as a mediatory field where his mind's eye in this broader sense and his body's eye interact, and the subjective and objective experiences merge.³⁴

³² "Eye and Mind" 298.

³³ "Eye and Mind" 298.

³⁴ In this sense Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is not entirely free from the remnant of Cartesianism, compared with the recent theories of the "embodied mind." For the philosophy that ascribes the work of mind to the body, see, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western

This wondrous state takes place in Lily's case, too. As she becomes more and more absorbed in painting, "she was losing consciousness of outer things . . . her mind kept throwing up from its depth, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain . . ." (TL 174). She is still looking at the same objects, but something in her mind comes up to the surface to meet them. She starts remembering small things that happened ten years ago: Charles Tansley's unkind words ("woman can't paint, can't write") and other episodes, and the scene on the beach, where they suddenly got on well, while Mrs. Ramsay was watching them in a protective way behind. Lily is struck with the idea that such a moment of friendship and liking survives "complete, so that she dipped into it to re-fashion her memory of him, and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art" (TL 175). A character realizes that an incident in the past has remained in his/her mind all the time and suddenly recaptures it as a complete image with full implication—such a scene can be cited as a typical example of Bergsonian epiphany: a real duration of time proves its existence against the linear temporality that we wrongly count in spatial terms. This scene is, however, made more than that since it is experienced by a painter at work. While the surrounding makes Lily remember things in the past, she lets her memories color it. Woolf subtly connects the emotional question of how to preserve the past to Lily's aesthetic vision setting into action: "In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking)

Thought (NY: Basic, 1999).

was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. ‘Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!’ she repeated. She owed this revelation to her” (TL 176).³⁵

According to Merleau-Ponty’s definition, the body is a locus where the past and the present meet: “I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relationships with the objective world; my present, which is my point of view on time, becomes one moment of time among all the others, my duration a reflection or abstract aspect of universal time, as my body is a mode of objective space” (PP 81-82). Just as one’s present perception is determined by the location of the body, one’s perception in the past now stored as memory is subject to where that body was. The past and the present cohere in Lily’s body, too, exactly because she has carried her body to the place where it was ten years ago. Amid the temporal and material flux, it is her body that stands out distinct and unfaltering; and with it, she tries to transfix her emotion on the canvas to become permanent. In this process, we may also find an answer to the formalist question we left unsolved in “The Window”: “finding” and “making” can take place simultaneously. As the memory of the past finds correspondence in the present, or to put it in another way, as the invisible emotion finds the visible form outside, a scene, “like a work of art” in memory, is being made into an actual artwork. The invisible and the visible, the past and the

³⁵ Informed not only by Merleau-Ponty’s theory but also by Anton Ehrenzweig’s psychological approach to the painting, Jack Stewart attempts to read the spiritual meaning that color and distance have in To the Lighthouse. Jack Stewart, “A ‘Need of Distance and Blue’: Space, Color, and Creativity in To the Lighthouse,” Twentieth Century Literature 46 (2000) 78-99. Anton Ehrenzweig, The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination (Berkeley: U of California, 1971).

present—these are proved able to coincide, and in the middle of this extraordinary fusion is Lily’s body as a kind of threshold. Hence “Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn” (TL 186). This sanctuary may be read as a metaphor of her own body standing to unify things that are irreconcilable without it.

Still, “the problem of space remained” (TL 186). In my view, it is with their attitude to space that both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty achieve a complete detachment from the Cartesian eye. The latter half of “Eye and Mind” is dedicated to the direct criticism of Descartes’ Optics and the possibility of modern painting. Merleau-Ponty regards the Cartesian model of vision as a project to “exorcise” the object-less things which have only visual existence—light, shadow, color, and space—so that he needs no longer be bothered by the visible. Descartes replaced light with a ball in order to show how light travels in space; he brought up the copper engraving (the painting without color) as a model of our understanding of the world by ideas in the mind (objects in the engraving have no resemblance to those in the real world, consisting only of lines, but we still recognize what they are), and he neglected to take up any other type of visual art as providing a model for the mind. Then Merleau-Ponty goes on to discuss the problem of depth in the painting, which would invalidate Descartes’ theory. Renaissance perspectivism deals with depth by treating it as a third dimension derived from other two: the object in front looks larger than the one at the back, and the difference in size is measured by

height and width. Similarly, when we acknowledge depth in reality, what we actually see is not depth itself, but the height and width of things in one's visual field. Depth itself does not have visible existence—it is a “concept” made of height and width, and what is really there is nothing but some spread of space. Our sense of depth thus crucially depends on where our body is in a certain space, which determines how large or small the object in question appears. The perspectivist technique of the Renaissance, from which Descartes took his inspiration, is not the ultimate solution: depth should be discussed in connection with the body that moves around in space and decides one's point of view. Merleau-Ponty thinks that painters have been always aware of this—no perspective can solve the problem of depth in their two-dimensional world—and have struggled to convey the reality of the world in which the body is immersed.

When Merleau-Ponty makes this point, it is Paul Cézanne that he has particularly in his mind. Cézanne, who was almost “the household god” in Bloomsbury,³⁶ also significantly interested Merleau-Ponty as an artist who grappled with depth all his life. He too wrote an essay on the painter entitled, “Cézanne's Doubt” (1945).³⁷ It is intellectually very close to Phenomenology of Perception, which was written in the same year and included many brief references to Cézanne. In this essay, Merleau-Ponty takes up Cézanne's work as a witness to his own theory of visual perception. Although he makes a number of other points, what he tries to say is basically that Cézanne's violation of traditional perspectivism is a result of

³⁶ Beechey 40.

³⁷ “Cézanne's Doubt,” Basic Writings 272-89.

his being faithful to actual visual experience. He discovered “the lived perspective . . . [which] is not a geometric or photographic one.”³⁸ If the overall composition of a Cézanne is viewed globally, “perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.”³⁹ Being truthful to the moment of actual perception, Cézanne at the same time did not sacrifice the objective thingness of the viewed object for spontaneous impression, as other Impressionists generally did. In Cézanne “[t]he object is no longer covered by reflections and lost in its relationships to the atmosphere and other objects: it seems subtly illuminated from within, light emanates from it, and the result is an impression of solidity and material substance.”⁴⁰ In short, he wishes to return to the object without abandoning Impressionist aesthetics of “paint as you really see it”—it is this almost impossible venture that makes his painting so idiosyncratic.

Merleau-Ponty’s view of Cézanne suits the overall scheme of To the Lighthouse, too. The novel is concerned with both the subjective impression and the objective reality of the object, and the tension brings forth its innovative strategy. Throughout the novel, space is the factor that Lily has been most worried about in her composition. At the dinner table in “The Window,” she decided to move a tree to the middle in order to “avoid that awkward space” (TL 92). Years later, though she is painting so

³⁸ “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 278.

³⁹ “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 278.

⁴⁰ “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 276.

impulsively now, she still sees it: “For what could be more formidable than that space? . . . the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention” (TL 172). How can the space be killed, or at least treated properly? The problem is linked with the elegiac question of the novel: how the death of Mrs. Ramsay should be mourned and her presence memorized? As Doyle suggests in her article, the space in the novel can be read from a feminist point of view. The “extraordinary emptiness” of the drawing room steps where Mrs. Ramsay’s shadow used to fall can be read as the “absent center” that feminist deconstructive critics locate at the core of language—a space to be filled by the maternal body. Woolf strategically turns the space inside out by corporealizing it, and making the space rendered as “nonexistent” by patriarchy visible and narratable.⁴¹ Indeed, the physical nature of Lily’s reaction toward the space is emphasized: Lily wonders “how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? . . . It was one’s body feeling, not one’s mind” (TL 194). The imaginary daughter’s longing for a mother is felt physically, not verbally; this time again, the corporeal is used to indicate things eluding male language. If this stopped here, however, it would be just the same as “The Window,” in which the window frame as the symbol of the male gaze was rather frailly combated with a pear tree that can never really abolish the “awkward space.” Now Lily sheds tears, cries out to Mrs. Ramsay and talks

⁴¹ Doyle 42.

to Mr. Carmichael in her heart, but nothing happens—nothing, until Mr. Ramsay's boat comes to her mind.

When she once more looks up from the canvas and recognizes the boat beyond, in the middle of the bay, Lily's fear of space starts transforming itself into something of a more positive nature. So fine is the morning that the sea and the sky are like one blue fabric; the cliff, ships, the lighthouse are all radiating in sunshine. While Lily is looking over them admiringly, the scene switches to Cam's thoughts on the boat: "They don't feel a thing there" (TL 198). Not being a child any more, Cam is now susceptible to the emotional struggle between sexes, and this makes her, though briefly, the third heroine of the novel. She and James think that they have been suffering from the authority and egoism of their father, and have made a compact "to resist a tyranny to the death" (TL 178). But hostility and contempt is not the only thing Cam feels for her father; she also has a great admiration for him. Mr. Ramsay himself has not changed much during the decade. He believes in the virtue of men working outside and women keeping house, and he feels some satisfaction in the story of a storm and shipwrecks that Macalister tells him. He is astounded by the hopeless vagueness of the female mind (Cam does not know the points of the compass!), but admits to himself that he rather likes that vagueness. He is reading even on the boat, and when he looks up, it is not to see the scenery but "to pin down some thought more exactly" (TL 206). All this Cam knows and she feels some resentment, but at the same time she is attracted since she too has internalized these values. She is conscious that her difficulties

are not shared by her brother: “you’re not exposed to it, to this pressure and division of feeling, this extraordinary temptation” (TL 184). Yet now she finds that these predicaments of hers are somehow attenuated, for the further they go offshore, the more unreal her life onshore becomes. Instead, her being on this boat here and now becomes more and more real. “They don’t feel a thing there,” she says to herself once more (TL 198), feeling escaped and peaceful. With her hand cutting through the green water (this too is a physical sensation), she seems to be the only person on the boat who is conscious of her body moving in space. Initially Mr. Ramsay imagines himself pacing up and down on the terrace, but this double vision does not lead to any new insight about himself: yonder he simply recognizes an old widower demanding sympathy, and soon picks up a book. James stubbornly fixes his gaze on the sail, determined not to give in to his father. His upright posture and steady gaze may indicate that he is on the way to acquire the male gaze, in spite of all his antipathy toward his father and longing for his deceased mother. In contrast to her male companions, Cam understands that the gradual change in her feeling is due to their house receding further and further away. Leaving behind the life of emotional complexity, on the sea she is able to be honest to her heart: she loves her father. He may be a despotic, gloomy old man, but she does admire him. It is the realization of her own mobile body and the changing point of view that enables her to relativize her suffering and to open her eyes to her true feeling. But this could lead to a reproduction of Mrs. Ramsay, a feminine, submissive woman to serve a Mr. Ramsay type. Cam’s

presence on the boat has significance because she is placed there as a counterpart of Lily. The two daughters of Mrs. Ramsay—one real and the other spiritual—alternately think about their parents from spatially as well as psychologically different points of view, and this “double vision” makes the novel’s contemplation of gender and vision even more profound and expansive.

On the shore, as if corresponding to the change in Cam, Lily also begins to appreciate space. “Distance had an extraordinary power” (TL 204), she thinks, standing and looking out over the bay. “[S]o much depends . . . upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us”: her feeling toward Mr. Ramsay is now “elongated, stretched out” (TL 207). No longer does she think of him with displeasure or violent sympathy. As the distance between people changes, their emotion also alters—in drawing our attention to this ordinary aspect of human relationship, Woolf adds her own viewpoint to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of perception: she mixes up the spatial and the emotional to the effect of making space, which is said to be “visible” as depth by perspectivism and “empty” by patriarchy, different from both. This is Lily’s new realization: “Empty it was not, but full to the brim. She seemed to be standing up to the lips in some substance, to move and float and sink in it, yes, for these waters were unfathomably deep” (TL 208). One’s body is immersed in space, which is loaded with emotion; one’s mood depends on his/her body that moves in this space to meet and talk with people. Also, Woolf’s metaphorical use of water here has a corresponding idea in Merleau-Ponty. In order to explain how modern

painting attempts to capture the sense of depth, he refers to the tiling at the bottom of a pool. In the pool, one sees it *through and because of* the thickness of water, not *despite* it: if there were no distortion, ripples of sunlight, and most importantly, one's body moving in the water, he would not see the tiling as it is. Of course the water and space are two different substances, just as one cannot say that emotion and space are the same. But "[t]his internal animation, this radiation of the visible is what the painter seeks under the name of depth, of space, of color."⁴² Similarly, Lily reaches the conclusion that now she can let space, the old enemy of hers, help her. As soon as she has thus made up her mind, somebody comes in the drawing room and sits in the chair besides the window. There appears a shadow on the steps, exactly where Mrs. Ramsay's fell ten years ago. It is no longer a perfect emptiness: it is a space full of memory, sorrow, and love.

Since the morning, Lily "felt curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there" (TL 171)—out there, to the lighthouse with Mr Ramsay and his children. The novel ends when this extraordinary feeling of dividedness (which is also an example of the painter's "magical state of vision" that Merleau-Ponty talks about) more or less subsides. Now Lily's exulted mood comes back to the level of ordinary life:

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy . . .

'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs Ramsay!' she cried, feeling the old horror come back—to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. (TL 218-19)

Nothing is ultimate in this continually changing world. One moves around

⁴² "Eye and Mind" 313.

and accumulates different impressions about objects and people. No matter how dramatic and intense the feelings they sometimes cause are, once the privileged moments are over, one continues to live in a quite ordinary way, sitting on a chair, writing or eating on a table. All these coalesce and make up life, and there is no absolute opinion or objective knowledge about one thing. Presently, the boat approaches the lighthouse and James is amazed by its commonness. But he knows that the other, mysterious and inapproachable lighthouse that he was dreaming of going to in his childhood is also the lighthouse, “[f]or nothing was simply one thing” (TL 202). Moving through both temporal and spatial distance, the characters’ journey comes to its final destination. The scene on the boat ends with Mr. Ramsay’s figure leaping into space, on to the rock. Almost simultaneously, Lily draws a line in the center of her picture and finishes it. When their bodily movement ceases, the narrative also comes to the end.

With the completion of Lily’s picture, Woolf’s unique strategy of the visual has reached its climax. It is undoubtedly in this novel that the problem of seeing and knowing, the difference between the male/female way of looking upon the world, and how our subjectivity interacts with the world of the object are topics explored in a most passionate, intensive way. In the end, the unification of people and the world, the past and the present, what one’s heart sees and what one knows, is almost miraculously attained with the body of the painter at work as a pivotal point. As the present perfect tense of Lily’s last remark, “I have had my vision” (TL 226), indicates (it stands out when the rest of the novel is written in the simple

past tense), this is an achievement which should be pinned down as it happens. No later explanation or recollection that is faithful to the original experience is possible, since the moment is brought about by the body in action. There is no such venture repeated in Woolf's later novels, but the critique of the mind-eye connection is made explicit again in her much later work, the anti-war essay Three Guineas (1938). Five photos of people who are generally regarded as "authoritative" (a general, heralds, a university procession, a judge, and an archbishop) are inserted, and Woolf designates the masculine, rigid view of the world that admits authority in them as the indirect cause of the war. She points out its neglect of our physical presence, especially the female body, and she goes on to insist on the necessity of changing our way of seeing the world. There she says, "the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through very past memory and present feeling."⁴³ This assertion now looks familiar to us: with this body's eye opposed to the mind's eye, Woolf insinuates that the existing mode of seeing is neither exclusive nor final.⁴⁴ Having started with the influence of her friends' formalist aesthetic and her own suspicion about the realist method of writing fiction, Woolf arrives at a strategy of the visual that can be achieved only through and in her verbal medium. To feature the physical nature of vision is what we can never expect from visual art alone, for it always needs some verbal theorization to explain it beside the artwork

⁴³ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993) 125.

⁴⁴ Maggie Humm extends a detailed discussion on Three Guineas from this point of view. See Humm 195-216.

itself. Just as in the case of the mind's eye, only when it is articulated in words does the body's eye come into being in our thoughts. In this sense, as long as it is a verbal construct, this physical eye too is the product of the mind. But it is a *female* mind gazing upon the body that has created it—Woolf thus radically overturns the longstanding Cartesian tradition, which assigns the mind to men, the body to women.

Chapter 6

From the Country House to the Painting:

The Postmodern Aesthetic Turn in Zadie Smith's On Beauty

In the previous chapters, I have looked at the gap between sight and knowledge that was gradually widened in people's consciousness due to technological developments and other sociological changes since the late nineteenth century, and have argued how this cognitive lapse affected the fiction of the early twentieth century by taking up the novels by Forster and Woolf as appropriate examples. In this chapter, however, I would like to turn my attention to contemporary literature and give some indication of potential developments in this area of the visual and knowledge. A crucial text for me in beginning to develop my ideas was Zadie Smith's On Beauty, published in 2005, the year I started my research on this subject. At first it drew my attention largely because it is so explicitly based on Forster's Howards End (1910), but as my research made progresses, this third novel by Smith came to take on a greater significance than simply a text of homage. In replacing the country house that looks for a spiritual heir in Forster's original with a painting, On Beauty seems to suggest the emergence of a new type of ocularcentrism, related perhaps to the shift from the modern and the colonialist to postmodern and postcolonial contexts. On Beauty's strong focalization on visual art and the act of seeing may indicate the surprising resilience of our belief in the power of sight

even after the deconstruction of traditional, Cartesian ocularcentrism. A much simpler question also made me wonder: which aspects of Howards End—a novel usually regarded as a canonical work on “Englishness” by an upper-middle class white male author—have attracted a contemporary female writer with a very different ethnic background? By exploring these questions, this final chapter attempts to connect my argument about modernism to current issues in the literature of our present world.

6.1. Far from the Flux of a Modern Metropolis: Howards End

In the acknowledgements in On Beauty, Smith expresses her love for Forster, to whom she thinks all her fiction is indebted, saying that “[t]his time I wanted to repay the debt with *hommage*.” Then the novel opens with a parody of the first line of Howards End about Helen’s letters to her sister: “One may as well begin with Jerome’s e-mails to his father” (OB 3). Given this pronounced influence of Howards End on Smith’s third novel, Maeve Tynan examines the relationship between the two novels in terms of hypotext and hypertext in postcolonial literature.¹ Postcolonial hypertext usually aims to enable the subaltern to speak (the most famous example of this may be Bertha in Jane Eyre given a voice by Jean Rhys in The Wide Sargasso Sea) and, by doing so, defamiliarizes the social and cultural norms taken for granted in the colonial hypotext. On Beauty marks, Tynan argues, a point of departure from this typical postcolonial rewriting since

¹ Maeve Tynan, “‘Only Connect’: Intertextuality and Identity in Zadie Smith’s On Beauty,” Zadie Smith: Critical Essays, ed. Tracey L. Walters (NY: Lang, 2008) 73-89.

the relationship between the two texts is now *nonconfrontational*. It is a positive reproduction of a beautiful artwork,² and, as in Howards End, in On Beauty too, a series of oppositions coexists and seeks a way to make a connection. In this sense, Smith's novel goes one step further than the earlier texts, whose theme is essentially the predicament of people stranded between two cultures. This seemingly new stage in postcolonial fiction accompanies another new phenomenon, that is, the resurrection of the aesthetic.³ Postcolonial fiction is a body of literature that questions all sorts of authoritative literary forms for their implicit and explicit associations with imperialism and other privileged discourses. The result has been heightened attention to the problem of representation, so that no aesthetic act or utterance can any longer be seen as politically or ideologically neutral. Novels from Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) to Smith's own White Teeth (2000), therefore, celebrate the "excess" of form in order to uncover the ideological restraint in Western notions of aesthetics. In On Beauty, however, the problem of the aesthetic is fully revived. Imitating the domestic plot of Howards End, it explores the moral possibility of the taste for beauty in contemporary multicultural society.

How can one's possession of aesthetic sensibility be ethically beneficial? This is one of the central issues around which Forster's fictional world is evolved. As we have seen in the first chapter on Where Angels

² The desire for begetting is what Elaine Scarry counts as one of the characteristic effects that beauty can have. See her On Beauty and Being Just (London: Duckworth, 2006) 4-8. Tynan rightly points out that this reproduction in a positive sense is applicable to Smith's adaptation of Forster's text. Tynan 78-79.

³ Ulka Anjaria, "On Beauty and Being Postcolonial: Aesthetics and Form in Zadie Smith," Walters 31-55.

Fear to Tread, it is to those who can truly enjoy beauty—whatever other defects they may have— to whom Forster gives the chance of self-improvement, whereas the possibility is firmly closed to the characters without genuine love for beauty. In Howards End, Forster for the first time directly grapples with the problem of how one's social and economic status affects the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility by describing the three different families: the Imperial, practical-minded Wilcoxes, the Schlegels, a family of German origin who extol art, literature and personal relationships, and the Basts hanging “at the extreme verge of gentility . . . [though] not in the abyss” (HE 58). Leonard Bast, who one guesses is “the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization had sucked into the town” (HE 122), has a strong ambition to become “cultured,” but his life as an insurance clerk does not allow him the extra time and energy to do so. On the way back from the Queen's Hall concert, from where Helen took back his umbrella by mistake, Leonard is dazzled by Margaret's clever talk about music:

Her speeches fluttered away from the young man like birds. If only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well-informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! But it would take one years. With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood? . . . Yes, the umbrella was the real trouble. Behind Monet and Debussy the umbrella persisted, with the steady beat of a drum. (HE 52-53)

The passage makes a point that none of Forster's earlier novels, which are basically concerned with the upper-middle class to which the author himself belongs, ever contemplates seriously: the cultivation of the sense of beauty, for this practice is not merely a matter of spirit, but largely relies

on physical circumstances. Because Leonard is poor, he has to work; he has to worry about whether he can recover his stolen umbrella—there is “always something that distracted him in the pursuit of beauty. For he did pursue beauty, and, therefore, Margaret’s speeches did flutter away from him like birds” (HE 53). Almost cruelly, this last sentence suggests that beauty is hard to attain by those in the position of having to consciously pursue it, and also that the acquisition of proper aesthetic taste is the social privilege of those whose living conditions naturally bring them into constant contact with beautiful objects.

This is nowhere more obvious than when Leonard famously attempts to use a passage from Ruskin’s The Stones of Venice to depict his dark, squalid flat.

‘Let us consider a little each of these characters in succession; and first (for of the absence of ventilation enough has been said already), what is very peculiar to this flat, its obscurity.’

Something told him that the modifications would not do; and that something, had he known it, was the spirit of English Prose. ‘My flat is dark as well as stuffy.’ Those were the words for him.

And the voice in the gondola rolled on, piping melodiously of Effort and Self-Sacrifice, full of high purpose, full of beauty, full even of sympathy and the love of men, yet somehow eluding all that was actual and insistent in Leonard’s life. For it was the voice of one who had never been dirty or hungry, and had not guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are. (HE 62)

The elegance of Ruskin’s style is not a pure product of his innate excellent taste. He is, in the first place, the “rich man . . . speaking to us from his gondola” (HE 61), and his prose couldn’t have been written, had there not been available to him a wealth which offered him a chance to travel to Venice and hire the gondola. Howards End casts light on the simplicity and inadequacy of nineteenth-century ideals of culture and equality, which the

author particularly associates with Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, in the face of the complexities of modern life in the early twentieth century.⁴ Although Forster undoubtedly shares the well-intentioned intellectual schemes of Ruskin and Arnold, when he includes people at “the verge of gentility” in his fictional world, he comes to realize the gap between those ideals and the reality, and refrains from unreservedly upholding the belief that the love for beauty is ethically inspiring. Such love, held by those who cannot afford to feed it, can be destructive—this is symbolically presented by Leonard’s death at *Howards End* as the Schlegels’ books pour onto him from the bookshelf.

While Leonard is indirectly ruined by a cultural ambition disproportionate to his social status, the Wilcoxes, on the contrary, show no such aspiration though they are wealthy enough to gratify it. For them, along with other progressive ideas that attract the Schlegel sisters, “Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, [are] nonsense” (*HE* 38). This ostensibly echoes the nineteenth-century view of art as a moral incentive, but in reality, the Wilcox clan is totally indifferent to the world of beauty, and in this we witness how the Ruskinian or Arnoldian creed has been stripped off of its original intention and passion while it has become so widely known as to be almost a cliché that even people like the Wilcox thoughtlessly refer to it. Unlike Helen, however, who detests the Wilcox’s way of thinking and turns her back on it after her unfortunate engagement with Paul, Margaret admits that it is

⁴ See Pat C. Hoy II, “The Narrow, Rich Staircase in Forster’s *Howards End*,” *Twentieth Century Literature*. 31: 2/3 (1985) 221-35.

their practical mind that sustains culture. On the Perbeck Hills, Margaret tells her sister about Henry's marriage proposal, and, seeing her disapproval, explains the good qualities she has found in a man like Henry Wilcox:

'If Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even. Just savagery. No—perhaps not even that. Without their spirit life might never have moved out of protoplasm. More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it. These are times when it seems to me—' (HE 177-78)

Such thinking of Margaret is “part of what makes Forster's book one of the most insightful and disquieting fictional treatments of the relationship between culture and capital.”⁵ The Empire has been enlarged thanks to the men like the Wilcoxes (Paul goes off to Nigeria; Henry is running the Imperial and West African Rubber Company), and it gave birth to the rentier class, to which the Schlegels and Forster himself belong. Earning their money not by work but by investment, people in this class act as generous supporters of art and philanthropy; but at the same time, they could be seen as “compromised by its fundamentally parasitic status.”⁶ Margaret's sense of wrongness about despising those who assure her income may be seen as a faithful reflection of the ambiguity inherent in the rentier class's mode of being.

Howards End puts forward much more nuanced, socially aware views about the conditions for appreciating the arts than many of his predecessors and contemporaries, but eventually this existential anxiety of

⁵ Daniel Born, “Private Gardens, Public Swamps: ‘Howards End’ and the Revaluation of Liberal Guilt,” Novel 25:2 (1992) 141-59 at 154.

⁶ Paul Delany, “Island of Money’: Rentier Culture in Howards End,” Tambling 67-80 at 68. References to the rentier culture below are all benefited by this article.

the rentier class needs to be assuaged. This Forster achieves by locating the novel's source of cultural values as far as possible from the demesne of capital. In the face of growing capitalism, the country house in late nineteenth and twentieth century literature has much more significance than a mere literal setting: it is a chosen emblem of the values rapidly disappearing from the earth—the pre-industrial, feudal link with land and the ideal of organic community.⁷ Property that is rightly transmitted and cherished from one generation to another has, to borrow Walter Benjamin's term, its own "aura"—a unique connection with the past.⁸ While the Schlegels are sensitive to the values embodied by Howards End (it is Mrs. Wilcox's "the Holy of Holies" and her "only one passion in life" [95], Margaret thinks), the Wilcoxes see it only from a materialistic point of view: "Howards End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir" (HE 107). After all, it is the Schlegels who are regarded as its righteous successors, since their love for culture and personal relationships enables them to appreciate the house properly. Their leisured life is justified in that it has the power to raise the spirit which will ensure the preservation of culture and tradition. Also, Leonard's tragicomic fall is compensated by the presence of his son as the next inheritor of Howards End. Nonetheless, this ending of the novel is satisfying only on the symbolic level; and the sisters' retreat into countryside is a temporary, passive solution to the issues presented in the

⁷ Richard Gill, Happy Rural Seat: The English Country House and the Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1972).

⁸ Delany 75.

body of the novel. Perhaps one way of putting this problem into words is that, although Forster sharply points out the inseparable connection between capital and culture, in order to defend the Schlegelian mode of being, he eventually has to cut off the link and place the novel's centre of cultural values in the rural area by creating a pastoral retreat.

This affects the novel's aesthetic strategy of describing the metropolis and the countryside, too. In the nineteenth-century, when there was still a physical continuity between man's labour and his materials, fiction was concerned with how to represent the process of work that produced an object. As capitalism moves toward a more advanced stage with the growth of Empire, this process of work becomes less and less transparent: it is mostly the work not of the body but of investment, distanced calculation, and profit-making. It is felt that products in one's visual field are brought about by a silent, invisible mechanism, and this sensation causes a crisis in realist representation.⁹ When Forster describes London, the centre of commerce, there is a strange *visual fluidity* all over. For example, the urban surrounding of Wickham Place is compared to the sobbing sea:

Their house was in Wickham Place, and fairly quiet, for a lofty promontory of buildings separated it from the main thoroughfare. One had the sense of a backwater, or rather of an estuary, whose waters flowed in from the invisible sea, and ebbed into a profound silence while the waves without were still beating. (HE 23)

In what follows, we are told that the old houses like this would also be

⁹ I have already mentioned Fredric Jameson's "Modernism and Imperialism," in which he discusses that the venture of imperialism creates a void in the colonizer's perceptual system not only abroad but at home—see my chapter three on A Passage to India. I am also indebted to Henry Turner's insightful observations about capital accumulation and the problem of representation in "Empires of Objects: Accumulation and Entropy in E. M. Forster's Howards End," Twentieth Century Literature 46:3 (2000) 328-45.

swept away in time and replaced by the tall buildings (HE 23). When the city's ceaselessly changing form—an outcome of the ungraspable scheme of capitalism—blurs the outlines of things and conceptually eludes realistic depiction, it can be approached only by analogy. Indeed, the metaphor of the sea and water is prevalent in the novel. To cite just a few, the Schlegels are “swimming gracefully on the gray tides of London” (HE 115); the city “rose and fell in a continual flux, while her shallows washed more widely against the hills of Surrey and over the fields of Hertfordshire” (HE 115); “One visualizes it [London] as a tract of quivering gray” (HE 116); Margaret hates the “continual flux of London. . . . eternal formlessness” (HE 184). What these descriptions all have in common is lack of form and color, which testifies to the difficulty that realism confronts in the face of growing capitalism. This relationship between the sea metaphor and imperialist capital is most unmistakable when Margaret is talking to Mrs. Munt about earning money by investment: “You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon islands. . . . as fast as our pounds crumble away into the sea they are renewed—from the sea, yes, from the sea” (HE 72). Britain, a small island, is controlling vast parts of the world from a distance, and as a consequence, the work of capital as a whole becomes unfathomable like the sea.

As long as she stays in the metropolis, Margaret is haunted with this sense of flux; but, once outside of it, her perceptual system leaves behind the paralysing effect of the sea of capital and regains its primal function. When Margaret has her first drive to Howards End, Henry's motor car

causes her to lose all sense of space: “She looked at the scenery. It heaved and merged like porridge. Presently it congealed. They had arrived [at Charles’s house]” (HE 199). Not being used to moving at such speed, her sense organs, her eyes particularly, cannot follow the quick flow of landscape. After stopping at Charles’s house, they drive on, and “again she lost all sense of space” (HE 199) until they finally reach Howards End and “she recaptured the sense of space which the motor had tried to rob from her” (HE 201).¹⁰ The scene of Margaret’s first encounter with the house vividly conveys the recovery of her sense perception:

Then the car turned away, and it was as if a curtain had risen. For the second time that day she saw the appearance of the earth.

There were the greengage trees that Helen had once described, there the tennis lawn, there the hedge that would be glorious with dog-roses in June, but the vision now was of black and palest green. Down by the dell-hole more vivid colours were awakening, and Lent lilies stood sentinel on its margin, or advanced in battalions over the grass. Tulips were a tray of jewels. She could not see the wych-elm tree, but a branch of the celebrated vine, studded with velvet knobs, had covered the porch. She was struck by the fertility of the soil; she had seldom been in a garden where the flowers looked so well, and even weeds she was idly plucking out of the porch were intensely green. Why had poor Mr Bryce fled from all this beauty? For she had already decided that the place was beautiful. (HE 200)

The disappearance of the car (and her husband) has an effect as if removing a curtain which has hitherto separated her from direct contact with the earth. The flowers and plants in the garden are described item by item, and one has the impression that the visual fluidity entropically spread all over London is gone, and color and form are restored. In this

¹⁰ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1977) is a study on how the development of the railway changed people’s spatial and temporal perception in the nineteenth century, and a major part of his discussion seems to be applicable to the spread of motorcar and its impact on our perceptual system in early-twentieth century England, too. See especially chapter three, “Railroad Space and Railroad Time” (33-44), in which he makes a point that in early-nineteenth-century writings the temporal diminution is expressed mostly in terms of a shrinking or annihilation of space. This is the case with Margaret, who is not used to moving rapidly from one place to another by motorcar.

part, the word “beautiful” is repeated: “Yes, and they [the empty rooms of Howards End] are beautiful. . . . Yes, the meadow was beautiful” (HE 201).

In this way, despite its keen awareness of the relationship between culture and capital, the novel is strongly inclined to quarantine its aesthetic centre from the influence of capital. As if a curtain between them has risen, beyond the amorphousness of the metropolis, there is a place full of beauty, where things exist with vivid colors and definite outlines. This point may be examined further by consulting Alan Wilde’s categorization of the three patterns in literary irony.¹¹ The first one, “mediative” irony, is essentially satiric and premodern since it imagines the world lapsed from a recoverable norm; “disjunctive” irony is the characteristic form of modernism and portrays the world as inherently fragmented but strives toward some resolution or transcendence that can coexist with the acknowledgement of the world as such; finally, the postmodern, “suspensive” irony presents the more radical vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, without showing any impulse towards coherence. As a mode of consciousness, the first two types assume “depth” under the surface of things: they have the expectation that, however disconnected the world appears, behind things there is a source of meaning and value. On the other hand, the third one renounces the idea of depth itself and negotiates with surface, but this surface is not superficial as it is no longer conceptually backed with depth; rather, in this horizontally perceived world, surface is featured as a “visible core.” In his argument Wilde

¹¹ Alan Wilde, The Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981).

extensively takes up Forster's works out of a recognition that his career illustrates better than that of any other major modernist the progression through and the interweaving of all the various forms irony assumes in the twentieth century.¹²

Although Wilde sees homoeroticism as the hidden force of Forsterian irony and mainly analyses his posthumous homosexual short stories, if we follow the scale that Wilde first sets up, it can be said that Howards End's attitude hovers between mediative and disjunctive ironies. Maintaining the view that the world may recover from the rule of capitalism, it simultaneously reveals rather more than a slight anxiety about entertaining such a hope. Near the end of the story, Margaret wonders: "Logically, they [the countryside and the country house] had no right to be alive. One's hope was in the weakness of logic. Were they possibly the earth beating time?" (HE 329). Forster depicts England at the early twentieth century, where, he fears, the aesthetic is about to be appropriated by the economic, but not yet fully. With its geographical distance from the city and its connection with the past, Howards End manages to serve as the novel's conceptual "depth," and by its spiritual inheritance from one woman to another, the novelist can describe the moral possibility of the taste for beauty as almost unstained by the force of capitalism.

Eventually, Howards End's answer to the problem of the moral and the aesthetic is not very far from that of his first novel. Chapter one

¹² Wilde 11.

examined how Where Angels Fear to Tread registers Forster's nascent struggle to stand apart from G. E. Moore's Idealist ethics. For Moore, good is an indefinable whole, which can be approached only through things that have intrinsic value, such as personal relationships and the beautiful. Moore's theory can be in many respects recognized as a descendant of Kant: Moore sets the concept of good in a transcendental realm (for Kant, moral judgement is the work of universal reason), and admits independent value to the beautiful (the Kantian idea of what is truly beautiful is unrelated to any interest). What is more, in Moore's theory, the relationship between the good and the beautiful is analogous as in Kant. The former is not defined but symbolized by the latter; the beautiful is a sort of sensuous counterpart of the good. In Where Angels Fear to Tread, Forster problematizes Moore's ethics and aesthetics by taking into consideration the "outer" world and right conduct, but in the end the protagonist remains in an idealist universe, where his moral improvement is secure, not necessarily connected to actual deed. Howards End deals with the outer world in a much broader scale and presents keen observations on the complex of morality, aesthetics, and capitalism. However, one cannot deny the impression that the novel finally recoils from it. Kantian philosophy, as well as its Bloomsbury offspring Moore's philosophy, is fundamentally refined out of the fear of modernity: against the contingency of the modern world, both are inclined to seek a transcendental domain for ethics and to see the experience of the beautiful as a means of access to it. In Howards End the house exists as a physical

correlative of such a domain, and the Schlegel sisters' cultural refinement is what ultimately allows them to settle there.

6.2. Seeing the Surface in the Postmodern World: On Beauty

On Beauty deals with a world where neither such a transcendental realm nor the idea of "depth" any longer exists in such unmediated terms. The tendency to see pre-modern and modernist literature as having depth is, in part at least, itself a product of the postmodern view of the world, as we have seen in Wilde's argument. In many senses, postmodernism abandons the mode of thinking that assumes a stable depth/surface relation. If one accepts the argument that the logic of capitalism has invaded everything in a globalized economy or a late capitalist consumer society, it is plainly impossible to assume a secure transcendental realm of autonomous "beauty" locatable outside the existing and immanent culture; there seems no hidden space behind visible things. The world is nothing but how it looks, and the exploration of its surface is the only valid way to think about it.¹³ To accept this Jamesonian view of culture, however, does not necessarily lead to a situation where the aesthetic must be entirely subjugated to ideological analysis. Although it has been assumed that the idealist belief in the aesthetic was completely dismantled by the Marxist critique, our desire to see it as not fully analyzable in materialist or

¹³ A representative work that has introduced this view of the postmodern world is Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (NY: Semiotext, 1983).

ideological terms seems unquenchable. In the 1990s and onward, a current of critical thinking has emerged which sets out to reinvestigate whether there is any sphere untouched by the Marxist and other ideological deconstructions of the aesthetic. This new movement does not deny the necessity of historicizing the aesthetic from socio-political points of view, but at the same time, it attempts to discover the margin left unexplained by such an approach. In the following part I would like to argue that, replacing the house in Howards End (a three-dimensional space to live in) with a two-dimensional item of visual art (a more purely aesthetic object with no such practical use), Smith's third novel becomes a fictionalization of this new attitude: it is so decidedly about "seeing the surface," but it also probes—though it sounds quite oxymoronic—how much density is latent on that surface.

One of the first things that strike us on reading On Beauty may be that it is so much about *seeing*—especially, *seeing the painting*.¹⁴ Based on the plot of Howards End, Smith has translated the problem of class in early twentieth century England into that of race in contemporary America, and one of the most noticeable changes from Forster's original is that it is not a house, but a painting, that requires a spiritual inheritor now. Like Howards End, the Belsey residence, 83 Lengham Drive, has its own historical background; but at the outset of the story, we are told that a significant inheritance has already happened. When Kiki's grandmother,

¹⁴ Susan Alice Fischer points out the symbolical use of sight throughout the novel and discusses how it challenges the stereotypical image of black, female beauty. "A Glance from God": Zadie Smith's On Beauty and Zora Nearl Hurston," Changing English: The International Journal of Teaching of English 14:3 (2007) 285-97 especially at 288-89.

who was a nurse, inherited it from a benevolent white doctor, that immediately rescued her family from its lower class status: “An inheritance on this scale changes everything for a poor family in America: it makes them middle class” (OB 17). Kiki’s great-great-grand mother was a house-slave; her great-grandmother, a maid; and now, Kiki is the wife of a white intellectual and working as a hospital administrator. The origin of Lengham Drive casts light on an issue which is non-existent in Forster’s work in 1910: race as the real backbone of the class system. From the viewpoint of inheritance, however, it has almost played out its role before the story begins, and therefore does not serve as a force to move the plot forward as the house in Howards End.¹⁵

Rather than functioning as an impetus for the plot, the house metaphorically stands for the seeds of the predicament from which the family will suffer. It is a beautiful nineteenth-century New England styled house, but its most precious part is hidden from the eyes of its inhabitants: the mottled green glass of the windows are “replacements, the originals being too precious to be used as windows. Heavily insured, they are kept in a large safe in the basement. A significant portion of the value of the Belsey house resides in windows that nobody may look through or open” (OB 16). This passage augurs two aesthetic problems which will be examined in more detail later. Firstly, the hidden glass implies the Belseys’

¹⁵ This part and the following observations about the photo gallery benefits from Fischer’s analysis of the Belsey house (286-87). However, I do not quite agree with her view that it stands at the centre of the novel as in Forster’s original. In my opinion, it is only in the past that the social signification of the house had a major effect on the course of people’s lives.

insensitiveness or blindness to beauty; secondly, its aesthetic value is converted into money (the glass is “heavily insured”). The skylight at the top of the house is the only original glass left untouched, but it too is not praised for its beauty, suggesting a more practical problem latent in the house. Despite having been married to a black woman for almost thirty years, and having three children with her, Howard “disliked and feared conversations with his children that concerned race” (OB 85). That the topic of race is a taboo in the family is symbolically presented by the multicolored spot created by the skylight: “[its] harlequin pane that casts a disc of varicoloured light upon different spots on the upper landing as the sun passes over America . . . Once the spot reaches the floor in mid morning it is a family superstition never to step through it” (OB 16). At the spiral staircase, there is a photo gallery of the Belseys all in black and white—this may insinuate that, while on the surface they are indifferent to the racial issue, they are in fact unable to see beyond the binary of black and white. The gallery begins with the children’s photos followed by Kiki’s maternal lines, and toward the bottom the pictures of Howard multiply, ending with the one of Howard and Kiki in Florida, in which Kiki is “shielding her eyes from either Howard or the sun or the camera” (OB 19). As years go by, it has become more and more difficult for Kiki to see where her inter-racial marriage is leading her family.

Instead of the house, then, it is more emphatically the painting that On Beauty takes up as a key figure. Most notable of all is the painting of a Voodoo goddess Maitresse Erzulie, which Carlene adores and shows to Kiki

in her new residence in Wellington. After her sudden death like Mrs. Wilcox's, it is moved to Monty's office and there is much ado about its righteous ownership. Levi, the youngest of the Kipps' children, steals it with his street friends from Haiti, believing that people like Monty bought many such artworks dirt cheap from the indigenous poor population and have traded them for huge sums in the States. For Levi, the destiny of this painting is the symbol of the cultural exploitation of the Third World. However, the truth is that it is not Monty but Carlene who bought it in Haiti before their marriage. She loved it all through her life and left it for Kiki, whom she designates as its spiritual legatee since she found that Kiki can see it as it is—not for its economic value, but simply for its beauty. In the course of their short-term but intense friendship, other paintings are also significantly referred to. Just like Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret, one day Carlene and Kiki go out Christmas shopping, and Carlene is struck by the idea that they can go to her family friends' house that afternoon to see “three Edward Hoppers, two Singer Sargents and a Miró” (OB 266). Carlene earnestly says, “I want you to see the pictures—they should be loved by somebody like you” (OB 268-69). Although this plan is checked by other members of the Kippses at the last minute, it is clear that in On Beauty the painting takes up the role of the house in Howards End: it signifies what the two female characters have in common in their hearts and strengthens the spiritual bond between them.¹⁶

¹⁶ Perhaps it is important to notice that all of these paintings are “original” and expected to have “aura” in the sense that Walter Benjamin uses the word in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility: The Second Version,” Walter Benjamin: Selected

Underpinning this fictional focus on visual art is a new movement in aesthetics and it is partly out of this context that Smith's fiction was written. In the preface, Smith refers to Elaine Scarry's On Beauty and Being Just (2000) as another great source of influence on her work. Against the contemporary anti-aesthetic trend in American academia, Scarry tries to reanimate discussion of the aesthetic on the ground of its ethical possibility.¹⁷ When one sees a beautiful object or person, Scarry says, one falls in a kind of trance and temporarily forgets about oneself. This effect of "radical decentering" may cause errors in our judgement, but by this very token, it makes us notice the limits of our own personal perspectives and sets us toward the consideration of things beyond. Also, coming across beauty, one feels a strong desire to duplicate it and share the joy with others. A beautiful object/person thus possesses the "pressure toward the distributional." These two attributes share the idea that beauty has a power to turn our thoughts to things and people other than ourselves and therefore can be a motive for being fair and promoting equality. Essentially, Scarry's argument can be placed in the genealogy of Kant in the sense that it sees aesthetic experience as spiritually uplifting, analogous to the understanding of the good.¹⁸ What makes her theory an effective

Writings, Vol. 3. trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002) 101-33. The novel is full of all kinds of copied products: CDs, music downloaded to Levi's iPod, fake bland bags, photo images on the internet or attached to the email, and so on. Even the paintings of Rembrandt, through which we can trace Howard's changing view of life, are images on the PC screen. Smith seems to believe in some power which only the original artwork possesses and entrusts to it the profundity of Carlene and Kiki's friendship.

¹⁷ Similar attempts to revive the aesthetic talk in the postmodern context is found in studies such as Isobel Armstrong, The Radical Aesthetics (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000) and Derek Attridge, Singularity of Literature (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁸ Scarry's vindication of art and beauty for its ethical effect is in many ways similar to

counterargument against the Marxist or ideological critiques of the Kantian aesthetic is that it succeeds in securing a metaphysical realm for beauty without ignoring the historically ingrained particular. Scarry admits that it is impossible to think about beauty apart from the actual object; nonetheless, she argues, beauty's power of propagating its copy over time and space cannot be fully located in each of the objects thus produced. In other words, Scarry locates the beautiful in history, but not the concept of beauty itself. This means that she opens up a space where the aesthetic is not entirely subject to ideological analysis. On the other hand, however, the ethical reasons for which she vindicates beauty seem to have less universality than she claims. Beauty is the thing unequally distributed among earthly objects and animals, and can engender hierarchy.¹⁹

Rather, what should be noticed here is that her argument shows a characteristically postmodern symptom, that is, the reversal of the traditional subordination of aesthetics to ethics.²⁰ Scarry's aim is to revitalize aesthetic talk, and the moral benefit expected from doing so is,

Iris Murdoch's. Through her revaluation of the Kantian notion of the sublime, Murdoch, too, examines art's power to incite alterity without entirely erasing the abstract space for beauty. See "The Sublime and the Good" and "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," Existentialists and Mystics: Writing on Philosophy and Literature, ed. Peter Conradi (London: Chatto, 1997) 205-20 and 261-86. Scarry admits Murdoch's influence when she mentions her while explaining the concept of "decentering." See Scarry 112-13.

¹⁹ Peter Benson, "On Beauty and Being Just by Elaine Scarry," Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas, Web. 9 Sep. 2009.

²⁰ Herbert Grabes, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and Alterity," Ethics and Aesthetics: The Moral Turn of Postmodernism, eds. Gerhard Hoffman and Alfred Hornung (Heidelberg: Winter, 1996) 13-27 at 13. Grabes classifies the approximation between ethics and aesthetics into five types. Following his categorization, we can say that Scarry's is "approximation via analogy," a Kantian strategy which finds similarities between aesthetics and ethics while leaving the autonomy of each intact. It is this aspect of Scarry's argument that Berenson sees as its defect: "Arguments from analogy always allow this leeway. They are dependent on the specific features chosen, the particular connections made. Over time the moral and political aspirations of society change."

strictly speaking, subject to this main purpose (the very word order in the title shows this—it is first of all “on beauty” and then “being just”). This becomes more obvious if we briefly compare Scarry’s argument with Moore’s. What Moore intended is, above all, to provide the transcendental *principia ethica*, and the beautiful is called forth in order to give it a sensible form. On the sensuous aspect of aesthetic enjoyment, Moore does not linger much: he treats aesthetic experience as a unique kind of emotional state, rather than focusing on its perceptual mechanism. However, once it turned out that the Kantian abstract basis of ethics cannot survive post-war epistemological deconstruction, it is this perceptual side of aesthetic experience that comes to be highlighted. Sense perception—the original Greek meaning of the aesthetic ²¹ —is “rediscovered” as a thing universally implanted in the human body, almost as the only domain which could elude the censure of ideology and also offer a possible arena for ethics.²² This is the basic structure of how the aesthetic has gradually permeated the moral sphere in postmodern thought.²³ This return to the original, pre-modern (and pre-modernist) concept of the aesthetic can be traced in Scarry’s book, too. Not only does

²¹ For more about the return to the original Greek sense of *aisthesis*, see Grabes 14.

²² This is a trend perceived in the emergence of what may be called “democratic aesthetics” from the 1990s onward. Studies such as Armstrong’s *The Radical Aesthetics* and Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1992) aim to break down the strong link between the aesthetic and social privilege. Both take up John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1932) and indicate the more sense-oriented, quotidian nature of aesthetic experience, which is universally experienced by anyone.

²³ Patricia Waugh regards postmodernism as a theoretical and representational “mood” in which what had previously been purely aesthetic concerns are extended into the spheres of the cognitive and the moral. The sense of failure about the Enlightenment project of knowledge, which has been long-standing since the age of Romanticism, culminates in postmodernism in the sense that the aesthetic takes over the fields that were previously defined by absolute terms in the tradition of Enlightenment. See Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1992) 1-10.

she extensively appeal to the writings of Homer, Plato, and Goethe, but also her key ideas, the radical decentering and the desire for distribution, emphasize the immediate, sensuous, and above all, for her, instinctual nature of our aesthetic experience. It is a body-oriented, pleasurable event (this is most obvious when she says that seeing a beautiful person incites in the viewer the strong desire to beget a child with him/her), but it also leads us to a higher realm of moral recognition.

On Beauty is written as a literary response oriented toward Scarry's book, and it fictionalizes Scarry's emphasis on the aesthetic in that each character's moral awareness comes into view through his/her attitude toward visual art. One of the novel's most severe ironies is that, while Carlene and Kiki show genuine love for the painting, there is no sign that their husbands do so, although they are both art critics teaching at a university. Monty and Howard have been working on Rembrandt from antagonistic points of view: Monty from the standpoint of the traditional art historian while Howard puts forward an Eagletonian view that any value said to be inherent in the painting is actually the reflection of some ideology. As Scarry criticises in her book, beauty tends to be ignored or underestimated in the educational scene of the United States, especially at university level, and Smith seems to suggest the sterility of this situation through the fact that it is their wives—they are far from "intellectual" in the sense that people at Wellington use the term—who can really appreciate art as well as the bond of family, while their husbands turn out to be morally corrupt, having affairs with students and neglecting

problems inside their households. Howard's anti-aestheticism, in particular, becomes harmful for the Belseys when he contradicts his theoretical position in his real life. Although as an art historian he dismisses the idea of beauty itself, as an individual he carries a fairly traditional view of female beauty, and this leads him into extra-marital affairs with women whose beauty is in the familiar mould of fashionable slimness. Out of dissatisfaction with Kiki's getting old and putting on weight, first he has a relationship with his poet colleague Claire Malcolm, a petite white woman. As the infuriated Kiki says, he could not have chosen anybody less like her as his lover (OB 206). The beauty of Monty's daughter Victoria Kipps is even more so "unflinchingly canonical" that her role as a caricaturized sex symbol is hard to miss.²⁴

This disjunction between Howard's art theory and his private taste for beauty is effectively suggested by a painting in the Belseys' house. When Kiki severely blames him for the affair with Claire,

Howard stopped underneath an abstract painting on the wall. Its main feature was a piece of thick white plaster, made to look like linen, crumpled up like a rag someone had thrown away. This action of throwing had been caught, by the artist, in mid-flight, with the 'linen' frozen in space, framed by a white wooden box that thrust out from the wall. (OB 206)

This abstract painting is most probably the choice of Howard, who "hates all representational painting" (OB 18). For one thing, it is characterized by an attempted exposure of the fallacy of naturalistic representation. The artificiality of both the natural fibre and the fluid movement that it appears to contain is highlighted by the white frame which encloses and

²⁴ Anjaria 47.

freezes its contents. The painting interrogates connection between movement and stasis, between the artificial and the real.²⁵ In this view, the painting appears to support Howard's theory: however natural it looks, an artwork is always an artificial construct, and therefore, not to be freed from the frame of ideological sets in the artist's mind or his time. At the same time, however, this painting seems to leave room for other interpretations. Its total whiteness may again stand for Howard and his family's color blindness, but now the difference lies in that Kiki starts to realize the real problem in her life: "I'm alone ... in this *sea* of white. I barely *know* any black folk any more, Howie. My whole life is white" (OB 206), she cries. So far she has been behaving as if she is one of the Wellingtonians, though she is often made aware of herself as a strangely isolated and ridiculous figure among them.²⁶ When her husband's infidelity is brought to light, she begins to contemplate the price that she has paid in order to adopt herself to her husband's world. The plaster in the shape of white crumpled linen may imply the bed on which Howard and Clair had their impulsive sex; just as it is removed from the plane of the ordinary and made into an artwork by the presence of the frame, Howard is insensitive to the fact that such an act really hurts his wife's feelings and

²⁵ Fiona Tolan, "Identifying the Precious in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*," *British Fiction Today*, eds. Philip Tew and Rod Mengham (London: Continuum, 2006) 128-37 at 132-33.

²⁶ For example, at their wedding anniversary party, a strange vision about herself comes to Kiki: "Sometimes you get a flash of what you look like to other people. This was unpleasant: a black woman in a headwrap, approaching with a bottle in one hand and a plate of food in the other, like a maid in an old movie" (OB 98). When she comes to know about Howard's liaison with Claire, again it is the gaze of others that she minds: "What have you made me *look like* in front of everybody in this town?" (OB 206). These scenes not only show how far Kiki has internalized the white man's gaze toward a non-intellectual black woman while she has lived among them but also insinuate her own feeling of "wrongness" that she secretly carries within the white community.

causes grave trouble to his family. Here the reader is invited to see the painting from Kiki's point of view, while there is no description of Howards's directly looking at it, which signifies his blindness to the real problems in his life. There is an ingenious irony in Smith's use of this painting—it hangs there to strengthen and announce Howard's superior taste and insight as an art historian, but the very painting allows a symbolical reading which casts a light on his blindness to the discontinuities between art and life in his own behaviour. The scene comes to an end with Howard slamming the door behind him, and Kiki kicks it shut. Due to the shock, the painting falls down to the floor, and this marks a new phase of their married life—Kiki's eyes are now open to her husband's duplicity, and this recognition gradually changes the nature of their relationship.

Also, one cannot overlook the fact that this abstract painting is in striking contrast to Carlene's favourite picture of the Voodoo goddess by Hector Hyppolite, which is described as follows:

In the centre of the frame there was a tall, naked black woman wearing only a red bandanna and standing in a fantastical white space, surrounded all about by tropical branches and kaleidoscopic fruit and flowers. Four pink birds, one green parrot. Three humming birds. Many brown butterflies. It was painted in a primitive, childlike style, everything flat on the canvas. No perspective, no depth. (OB 174-75)

The overflow of the vivid colors and tropical flora and fauna incites a very rich image in the reader's mind. The naked goddess standing in the middle shines with substantial actuality, whereas the presence of the body is only vaguely implied by the crumpled rag in Howard's abstract painting. As for this actuality of the body, we should turn to an earlier conversation

between the two women. When they meet for the first time and talk about family, Carlene mentions the traditional association of women and the body: “Men move with their minds, and women must move with their bodies, whether we like it or not. That’s how God intended it—I have always felt that so strongly” (OB 96). To Kiki, this sounds incredibly anachronistic, so she mildly criticizes her idea by saying that she feels men and women use their minds equally. But Carlene insists:

‘Oh, I don’t. No, I *don’t*. Everything I do I do with my body. Even my soul is made up of raw meat, flesh. Truth is in a face, as much as it is anywhere. We women know that faces are full of meaning, I think. Men have the gift of pretending that’s not true. And this is where their power comes from. Monty hardly knows he has a body at all!’ She laughed and put a hand to Kiki’s face. ‘You have a marvellous face, for example. And the moment I saw you I knew I would like you.’

The silliness of this made Kiki laugh too. She shook her head at the compliment. (OB 96)

After reading this passage one realizes that what Carlene is saying is not the simple reinforcement of the familiar antagonism between the male intellect and the female body. Her recognition that everything she does involves her body seems to approach Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of the body discussed in the previous chapter—it is not a conceptual opponent to the mind as it is in the Cartesian tradition but a real physical entity which meets and interacts with the world and is part of the operation of mind as an embodied consciousness. Though far from being couched in such terms of intellectual reflection—which is part of the point—Carlene’s thought, that even her soul is made of her flesh, draws near the insight which Merleau-Ponty develops in order to demolish the dichotomy of the mind/body. In her opinion, it is particularly on the face that one can trace the truth about its owner: it is where his or her internal thoughts and ideas

are made visible as a point of interaction with the external world.



Hector Hyppolite. Maitresse Erzulie.²⁷

With this view of the body in mind, that the Erzulie painting has *neither perspective nor depth* seems to be most significant. The perspective is a cultural consensus which was established in the intellectual framework of Renaissance humanism and later found its philosophical analogues in Cartesian epistemology. As Descartes' model of the eye ignores the field stretching beyond its point of focus in order to be a system of knowledge, with the assumption that what is seen on the canvas is always one aspect of things, the law of perspective creates the concept of "depth," an abstract realm inaccessible to direct experience.²⁸ The abandonment of perspectivism therefore means to annul the premise of such abstract space and instead affirm the actuality of what is visible there,

²⁷ Hector Hyppolite, Maitresse Erzulie, 1948. Heritage Konpa Magazine, Web. 12 Dec. 2009.

²⁸ See Ermarth and my discussion in chapter five.

on the surface of the canvas; and the object whose reality is assured here in this non-Western, Haitian painting is the goddess's physical presence.

This aspect of the novel's key painting suits Wilde's concept of postmodern "suspensive" irony, too. It deals with the world where the impulse toward transcendental essence of being or meaning is no longer sustained and only the things on the surface have relative meanings in relation to other objects in the horizontally perceived world. Wilde admits his debt to Merleau-Ponty in forming his idea about the axiological as well as epistemological change in literary irony and says: "the shift of value, as well as in position, is best defined, for my purposes, in terms of a displacement of the dimensionality (in this case from vertical to horizontal) that determines both the angle and fixity of man's perceptions and of the more complex structures [including linguistic activities] he develops from them."²⁹ Smith is often called a child of the multicultural age, and in her world of advanced racial and cultural hybridity, there is no moral centre or authority such as *Howards End*. Nevertheless, this lack of moral depth by no means indicates that her novel is not concerned with ethical questions. On the contrary, Smith seems to put forward a serious re-evaluation of how much ethical truth lies in the *appearance* of the world; and as the painting of the Voodoo goddess epitomizes, for her this issue is inseparably linked to the problem of the body as our visible surface. Whatever is said officially, one's skin color and physical beauty do have great influence on one's life, and it can be harmful to underestimate this reality.

²⁹ Wilde 16. For more about Wilde's debt to Merleau-Ponty, see Wilde 14-16.

Kiki's words at the disclosure of Howard's affair with Claire herald this theme of the novel: "It's true that men—they respond to beauty . . . it doesn't end for them, this . . . this *concern* with beauty as a physical actuality in the world—and that's clearly imprisoning and it infantilizes . . . but it's *true* and . . . I don't know how else to explain what—" (OB 207). This remark of Kiki is important not only because it recognizes the power of beauty as a "physical actuality in the world" (linked to reproductive survival) but also because the very tentativeness of her words registers the mysterious attraction of beauty, which cannot be wholly explained or theorized. The power of beauty first takes the usual form of men sexually responding to female beauty. This is most typically seen in the case of Victoria, and here again, the problem of gender entwines with that of race: people see her as a sexy young black female, almost as an incarnation of sex. She is well aware of this, and purposely plays the role of a seducer, particularly in her relationship with Howard. Kiki is equally conscious of how people look at her, but the male gaze influences her in the exactly opposite way. When she runs into Claire and Warren Crane in the town, she notices that she is "no longer in the sexual universe" (OB 51), and this is followed by the recognition that "they were brought up that way, these white American boys: I'm the Aunt Jemima on the cookie boxes of their childhoods, the pair of thick ankles Tom and Jerry played around. Of course they find me funny" (OB 51). This scene clarifies the strong connection between the male gaze and the white man's gaze.³⁰ What

³⁰ As for this connection, see Kaplan, Looking for the Other.

people expect from Kiki, now a fat middle-aged black woman, is the role of mammy, the stereotypical image of black women that was cultivated during slavery and has secured a permanent place in today's American culture. Since her body now stands at the margins of white America's standard of beauty, she is viewed as an asexual being like Aunt Jemima, whose figure is characterized above all by the domestic, maternal role she plays in relation to the white family.³¹ What Victoria and Kiki have in common is that they both read in other people's gaze the roles they are expected to play; this awareness *on the side of the viewed* functions as a satirical device to expose the violence of white-male-dominated gaze, though it does not have the power to overturn it.

Not only men are looking at the opposite sex in the light of sex appeal (or the lack of it): women also watch men in such a way.³² We see this in the case of Carl, whose beauty is an irresistible allure for women. Almost all the female characters are thrilled by his physical beauty, but it is particularly Zora—Howard's daughter who flatters herself that she has inherited her father's brain more than anybody else in the family—who has

³¹ For Kiki's role as the mammy stereotype, see Tracy L. Walters, "Still Mammies and Hos: Stereotypical Images of Black Women in Zadie Smith's Novels," Walters 123-40 at 128-33. In this article Walters points out that the highly stereotypical female character in Smith's fiction reflects the problem of the black community's acceptance of the misogynist language, that is, the representation of the black female as the white women's Other. But she also suggests that Smith shows "how stereotypes in literature can also be used as a satirical device to expose racism, sexism, and other biases" (127) and concludes her article with the hope of Smith's creating unstereotypical female figures in her future works. I have also consulted her argument on Victoria as another stereotype, the jezebel, whose main attribute is her hypersexuality. See 134-37.

³² This may help us see that beauty has more universal power than what the ongoing argument about the gaze makes us believe—that is, it is the ideological weapon of the culturally privileged. As Benson points out in his article, Scarry, too, seems to notice the possibility that the talk about the male gaze may impoverish our thoughts about the power of beauty.

become enthusiastic about him. When she first sees Carl at the Requiem concert, she cannot ignore the fact that he is “stupidly good-looking” (OB 74). Interestingly, when she comes across him for the second time at the swimming pool, Carl takes Zora’s goggles by mistake and this brings them into conversation. Zora is arrested by the sight of Carl’s half-naked body and, without noticing, falls in love. His beauty is an undeniable reality overcoming her power of reason—this is implied by her lost goggles, which has a similar function to the broken field glasses of Adela in A Passage to India. As I have been discussing, to see clearly is firmly connected with the work of reason and the acquisition of knowledge in the Western tradition; the figure of Zora here, who has lost the device with which she sees (in the pool) and cannot continue what she was doing (swimming) stands for the inexplicable power of beauty which carries one away. Zora tries to ignore the real nature of her feelings and instead starts a fervid campaign to secure a place for him in Wellington so that, she thinks, the university can learn from the street rapper about his subculture. But Carl is not interested in Zora in any sexual terms, and her effort miserably ends up in her witnessing Carl kissing Victoria at a party. Enraged by Zora’s unjust criticism, Carl discloses the scandal of Howard and Monty (the latter, too, starts an affair with his assistant Chantelle soon after—or it might be even before—Carlene’s death, which makes Carlene’s words about men ignoring their bodies sound more ironic). Zora, Howard and Monty are all proud of their intellect, but they all close their eyes to the fact that a beautiful person has actually had an enormous impact on their lives, and they are

indiscreet about the consequence of their behaviour. As Carl's parting words to Zora encapsulate, they are clever but ethically underdeveloped: "You got your college degrees, but you don't even live right. You people are all the same. . . . I need to be with *my people*, man—I can't do this no more" (OB 418-19). What he has been dreaming about higher education is destroyed, and he turns his back on Wellington. To open the university to the underprivileged and to learn from their culture—it is not so much the scheme itself that is seen as a fraud; rather, Smith seems to suggest that even the best schemes turn out to be fruitless when carried out by ethically insincere, self-deceiving people.

Toward the end of the novel, the Belseys gradually shake off the emotional hypocrisy that has inflicted pain on themselves, and for Howard, this takes the form of a change in his way of viewing artworks. A symptom emerges when he is preparing for a public lecture for his sabbatical. Howard opens a website on Rembrandt's works and sees The Sampling Officials of the Draper's Guild on screen. Traditional art historians interpret this painting as "what *judgement* looks like: considered, rational, benign judgement" (OB 383). Throughout his career as an academic, Howard has been rejecting such assumptions. All that he sees on the canvas is "the depiction of economic power" (OB 384): the six rich men sitting for their portrait, expecting and demanding to be collectively portrayed as wealthy, successful and morally sound, and Howard admits no spiritual meaning beyond its frame. On this day, however, Howard's thoughts falter and, without realizing, he starts to blur the boundary

between the world of art and that of his own life:

Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. On that day, forty-three years ago, he was an uncultured, fiercely bright, dirty-kneed, enraged, beautiful, inspired, bloody-minded schoolboy who came from nowhere and nothing and yet was determined not to stay that way—*that* was the Howard Belsey whom the Staalmeesters saw and judged that day. But what was their judgement now? Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. (OB 385)

Here, Howard unconsciously takes up the traditional idea he usually turns down: the painting shows some kind of judgement. He thinks that it “judged” him decades ago and wonders how they would judge him now, the middle-aged man who has gone through two extramarital affairs. The reciprocal nature of their gaze—Howard looks at the six men, and they look at Howard—hints a private link forged between Howard’s life and the painting. At this moment the link is a secret one, and Howard is not aware of it himself, though.

It is in the last part of the novel that this connection between art and life takes over and overwhelms Howard. Now his affair with Victoria, too, is known to Kiki, and they are living apart, having separate bank accounts, perhaps heading for divorce—at least, people believe so. But on his invitation Kiki comes to his lecture. At the start of his power-point presentation, he spots Kiki in the audience. Her demeanour easily reminds the reader of the Voodoo goddess Erzulie: “She wore a scarlet ribbon threaded through her plait, and her shoulders were bare and gleaming” (OB 442). Her lively appearance may indicate the independence she has won; this may be the reason why the Erzulie painting does not make a significant appearance after it was discovered in Levi’s room. In the last

chapter the Belsey children are discussing what Kiki will do with it, but there is no direct description of it.³³ With the painting Kiki inherits the spiritual independence that Carlene managed to maintain while being a seemingly most conservative, loving housewife. With the newly acquired inner richness, now Kiki herself is a radiating, eye-catching figure like the Haitian goddess.

Instead of the Erzulie painting, here at the end, the novel takes up a classical Western painting, in which we might see the possible future of Howard and Kiki. At the sight of Kiki among the audience, Howard falls into silence and just keeps pressing the button.³⁴ Then several portraits of Rembrandt come up: “. . . and the artist himself. And the artist himself. And the artist himself” (OB 442). He smiles to Kiki, and turns his head and looked at the picture behind him, and “*Hendrickje Bathing*, 1654,’ croaked Howard and said no more” (OB 442). Here the life of Rembrandt and that of Howard, and the painter’s love for Hendrickje—a maid with whom he spent the latter half of his life—and Howard’s love for Kiki, overlap and resonate. The story ends with the sign of a new tie just born between them:

On the wall, a pretty, blousy Dutch woman in a simple white smock paddled in water up to her calves. Howard’s audience looked at her and then at Howard and then at the woman once more, awaiting elucidation. The woman, for her part, looked away, coyly, into the water. She seemed to be considering whether to wade deeper. The surface of the water was dark, reflective—a cautious bather could not be certain of what lurked beneath. Howard looked at Kiki. In her face, his life. Kiki looked up suddenly at

³³ Even when it was found under Levi’s bed, the text makes a rather passing remark: “Jerome [was left] to stare at the naked brown woman surrounded by her Technicolor flowers and fruit” (OB 426).

³⁴ The practical reason is that he left his manuscript in his car, but apparently this is just a superficial reason, and as we will see in the following, Smith gives his speechlessness much more psychological significance.

Howard—not, he thought, unkindly. Howard said nothing. Another silent minute passed. The audience began to mutter perplexedly. Howard made the picture larger on the wall, as Smith had explained to him how to do. The woman's fleshiness filled the wall. He looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only. He smiled at her. She smiled. She looked away, but she smiled. Howard looked back at the woman on the wall, Rembrandt's love, Hendrickje. Though her hands were imprecise blurs, paint heaped on paint and roiled with the brush, the rest of her skin had been expertly rendered in all its variety—chalky whites and lively pinks, the underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come. (OB 442-3)

What is most interesting about this passage is that *it recaptures the sense of depth*. Hendrickje is standing in a stream and looks into the water, wondering whether to go deeper or not. Its dark, reflective surface is mysterious, and one never knows what lurks beneath. At this moment Howard looks at Kiki's face and there he sees his life. The expression "in her face, his life" can have two slightly different meanings. One is that her face is like a mirror where he can see his own life reflected; another is, more simply, that she is his love, his life. The phrase may mean both. As he does not know what Kiki is thinking, the future course of his life and love is unfathomable like the stream. Perhaps Kiki herself is not decided, and she looks away just like Hendrickje in the painting. At the very end, On Beauty turns to the depth of emotion and the infinite possibility of human relationship.

Beside the similarities in plot, this may be where Forster's fiction influenced Smith most: after examining the truth that lies in the surface of the world, she opens up the narrative with a Forsterian belief in the infinite power of personal relationship for its uncertainty (Smith once explains she loves Forster for his undecided way of describing his character: the chaotic structure and the deliberate rejection of a controlled

style in his fiction sincerely reflect the complexities of the human heart).³⁵ Nonetheless, this does not exactly mean that the novel in the end regains the modernist depth/surface relationship, since the appearance of the world is not denied its reality, either. The last scene closes with the macroscopic view of Hendrickje as if to say that, in the present world with no stable ethical norms, we can make our life better only by seeing the world more closely with the eyes wide open. Truth may be found in the detail that we have overlooked so far and in the emotions incited by such new discoveries. This model of surface (what we see) and depth (what we feel) are interactive and are not presented as binary oppositions. As Carlene said to Kiki, “the eyes and the heart are directly connected” (OB 268), and in the final scene the reader realizes this with Howard. Now the only thing he can see in front of him is the woman he loves. Art and life, his vision and his heart, are now connected to face the “intimation of what is to come.”

³⁵ Zadie Smith, “Love, Actually,” Guardian.co.uk, The Guardian, 1 Nov. 2003. Web. 10 March, 2009.



Rembrandt van Rijn.
A Woman Bathing in a Stream (Hendrickje Stoffels?).³⁶

³⁶ This is the title shown on the website of National Gallery, which houses it at present. Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, A Woman Bathing in a Stream (Hendrickje Stoffels?) 1654. National Gallery, London, Web. 17 Dec. 2009.

Conclusion

First taking up Forster as a main figure and later shifting its point of focus to Woolf and then to a contemporary adaptation of Forster's Howards End, this dissertation has looked at how literature can respond when our long-standing belief in the sight's ability to reach knowledge is challenged. Forster's novels, written at the dawn of the twentieth century, can be read as a remarkably honest record of the age's epistemological anxiety and puzzlement at the recognition that the positive equation of seeing and knowing in its familiar Cartesian guise was hardly possible any more. The dim feeling of unfitness that Forster felt about his "photo-graphic gift" at the beginning of his career accompanied him all the way through Italy, England, and finally to India, where his realist camera faced so much strain that he could not imagine himself writing another novel. For Woolf, on the other hand, whose prime as a novelist came after that of Forster, this condition appeared not so much as a "crisis" but rather as a stimulus to invent her new feminist aesthetics of the visual, which is positively assisted by the concept of sight as physical. It culminates with Lily Briscoe the painter's severe effort to seize her vision, onto which Woolf may have projected her own venture, which was to grow out of the realist method of writing. The last chapter casts light on a moment that could be called a new type of ocularcentrism, but it remains just one of the possible turns that our present culture might take in the future. Before concluding

this dissertation, I would like to think a little more about this possible future of our visual culture by briefly taking up a best-selling popular fiction, hoping to add further insights to my discussion in the last chapter.

Tracy Chevalier's Girl with a Pearl Earring (1999) is a novel that almost fanatically revives the power of observation. According to the author, the inspiration came from a poster of Vermeer's painting of the same title, which had been by her bedside for many years. One day she suddenly wondered what story lay behind to make the girl look like that, and the story came forth naturally: "Within three days I had the whole story worked out. It was effortless; I could see all the drama and conflict in the look on her face. Vermeer had done my work for me."¹ The close compact thus established between the painting and the novelist in her imagination gave birth to a remarkably static world, in which the visual image is more eloquent than anything else. From the very beginning, this is made clear:

My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. I was surprised, for I thought she knew me well. Strangers would think I was calm. I did not cry as a baby. Only my mother would note the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my already wide eyes.²

The novel's aesthetics is all present in this characteristically curtailed first-person narrative: the truth always arrives through the eye, not through words or sound, in such a way that it is accessible only to those

¹ Tracey Chevalier, "Girl with a Pearl Earring: Inspiration," Tracey Chevalier Official Site, N.p., n.d., Web. 5 Jan. 2010.

² Tracey Chevalier, The Girl with a Pearl Earring, 1999 (London: Collins, 2005) 3. Hereafter citations from this book will be shown in the parenthesis with the abbreviation of GPE.

with keen powers of observation (in this case, since her childhood, only her mother notices Griet's true feeling, which becomes evident through some small changes in her face). With her "wide eyes," the heroine Griet is described as one of the few to whom knowledge always takes the visual form: for example, when the Vermeers visit her house, she can "hear rich carpets in their voices, books and pearls and fur," while in her mother's she hears "a cooking pot, a flagon" (GPE 3). At this first meeting, Vermeer's wife Catherina's clumsiness is already obvious to her eyes: she carelessly catches a knife with a fold of her mantle, and the image of it spinning across the kitchen floor is burnt into her eyes so that it comes back to her later when Tanneke tells her how clumsy their mistress usually is (GPE 58). Griet's father is blind—the explosion of the furnace took both his sight and tile business from him—and this fact attaches even more importance to Griet's excellent ability to see. Though indirectly, she starts serving Vermeer in order to compensate for her father's lost sight: she is to clean up his studio without moving the things that he has placed in a certain way for his painting, and she manages to do this since she does the same for her blind father daily.

What seems to justify this almost anachronistically strong emphasis on the power of sight is, of course, the novel's historical setting in seventeenth century Delft and the presence of the mysterious painter Jan Vermeer. Central in the novel is his studio, where the artist devotes himself to the world of art. It is a sanctuary which other characters are not allowed to enter alone except Griet, whose innate aesthetic sensibility

gradually brings about an intimacy with the painter, while Catharina is forbidden to go in the studio ever since she broke a camera obscura that her husband borrowed from a friend. Whether the realism of Vermeer's painting comes from his use of the camera obscura and copying the image has been a major issue in the actual art criticism on the painter, but here I would rather turn to Jonathan Crary's argument in Techniques of the Observer, which examines how the camera obscura is complicit with the emergence of a modern observing subject.³

Crary takes up the camera obscura not merely as an optical device but rather as a paradigm of how vision leads to truthful inferences about the world in both rationalist and empiricist thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁴ There are two main observations made by Crary: that camera obscura indicates the hegemony of a new subject-effect, since it necessarily defines an observer as isolated, enclosed, and autonomous within its dark confines. Another decisive function of it is to sunder the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer, to decorporealize vision: in order to establish a space of reason, the camera obscura *a priori* excludes the view's body from its visual field.⁵ Crary further links these points to Descartes' understanding of the world as uniquely perceived by the mind, not by the senses:

The space of the camera obscura, its enclosedness, its darkness, its separation from an exterior, incarnates Decartes's "I will now shut my eyes,

³ Crary himself carefully draws a line between the trend in the art criticism on Vermeer and his own argument. See footnote 45 on page 43 and 46.

⁴ Crary 25-66.

⁵ For these two main points, see especially Crary 38-41.

I shall stop my ears, I shall disregard my senses.” The orderly and calculable penetration of light rays through the single opening of the camera corresponds to the flooding of the mind by the light of reason, not the potentially dangerous dazzlement of the senses by the light of the sun.⁶

Here it is particularly Vermeer’s two paintings, The Astronomer and The Geographer, both painted around 1668, that Crary cites as paradigmatic representations of this “Cartesian camera obscura.”⁷ Each depicts a solitary male absorbed in his study in a dark room with a single window. Their eyes are averted from it, indicating that the exterior world is known not by direct sensory examination but through a mental survey of its clear and distinct representation—the celestial globe and the nautical map—located within the room.

Chevalier’s Girl with a Pearl Earring mentions nine paintings by Vermeer, but not including the two taken up by Crary. Instead, each of them has at least one female figure in it, and the novel tries to imagine the backstage episode—above all, the secret romance between the painter and a young maid, which prompted the birth of Vermeer’s masterpiece. In this way, Chevalier’s novel is an attempt to see through and rewrite what seems to be the deliberately composed, self-possessed world of Vermeer’s paintings. Accordingly, when the camera obscura makes appearance in the story, the narrative ingeniously introduces what Crary’s model of “Cartesian camera obscura” excludes from the scene. Vermeer urges Griet to look in the optical device and takes off his robe to cover her. Griet wonders if anyone sees them what they would think. Sexual implications

⁶ Crary 43.

⁷ Crary 43-47.

intrude insidiously into the scene: “I did not know what to do. The thought of me covered with his robe, unable to see, and him looking at me all the while, made me feel faint” (GPE 60). (The film version is more explicit in indicating this—Colin Firth’s Vermeer slips in under the robe besides Griet, and she is surprised at the nearness of his body.⁸) If at the beginning the painter’s studio serves as a space like a large camera obscura in the Vermeer household, from which secular matters are excluded to leave the artist alone in his own world of art, Griet gradually invades the sanctuary until it culminates in her symbolic loss of virginity when Vermeer pierces her ear (this is matched by the literal defloration with the butcher’s son Pieter) to draw her with the pearl earring, which is followed by Catharina’s miscarriage in the studio at the finding of the painting. Many years later, Griet still looks back at the incident: “Sometimes I pictured his studio with Catharina’s blood on the floor and wondered how he was able still to work there” (GPE 235). The body that was marginalized into a phantom in the Cartesian camera obscura is thus retrieved by a contemporary female writer in a most explicit way.

This brief observation on Chevalier’s novel may support my argument in the previous chapter: the new type of ocularcentrism which might be about to emerge is one which tries to restore the equation of seeing and knowing without ignoring the physical body as the visible reality in our universe. Marxist critics such as Jameson would find Chevalier’s novel as an appropriate vehicle for marking the end of history

⁸ Girl with a Pearl Earring, dir. Peter Webber, perf. Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson. Gaga, 2003.

in the postmodern aesthetic turn. About its film version, Jameson might have something similar to say as in his view of Derek Jarman's 1982 film Caravaggio: that it is a nostalgia film in which the plot (Caravaggio's life) is subject to the actors' tableau vivant inserted here and there in the film; the evacuated content is only compensated for by the supremacy of its visual effect.⁹ At least, however, being nostalgic about something means that that something is still conceived as, if not desirous, at least in some way appealing in our mind, and therefore it may not be so inappropriate to see in the huge success of Chevalier's novel and the film version of it an indicator of our undying enthusiasm for a world in which seeing infallibly leads to truth, and then to wonder where it will take us next.

It has been said that there are certain signs in our postmodern culture that mark a change in its epistemological assumptions: that is, a shift from seeing to listening. It is in this move that critics have aspired to see possibilities of redemption in late capitalist society.¹⁰ For example, in "The Despot Eye and Its Shadow: Media Image in the Age of Literacy," Robert D. Romanyshyn attempts a psychological approach: our consciousness cultivated through daily exposure to media image (most notably of all, to television) is a shadow, a cultural unconscious of ego-ocular-verbocentric modernity.¹¹ Romanyshyn points out that the critical view that this media image culture is vulgar, illogical, and

⁹ Fredric Jameson, "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity," The Cultural Turn (London: Verso, 1998) 93-135. For his discussion on Caravaggio, see 124-45.

¹⁰ For a concise overview of this move, see Levin, Modernity 3-4.

¹¹ Robert D. Romanyshyn, "The Despot Eye and Its Shadow: Media Image in the Age of Literacy," Levin, Modernity 339-60.

pleasure-seeking unconsciously employs as object of comparison the values of book literacy (linearity, coherence, continuity, focused concentration and so on). The article continues by tracing back two origins of this situation, one of which is Descartes' *cogito* project which transforms the body and senses attached to it into "the corpse" (the body as anatomical object as in his eye model in the introduction) which is also related to the figure of "the consumer" (the body as object of pleasure and profit). They are twins, "the former the legitimate offspring of Cartesian vision and the latter the black sheep."¹² The other origin is Leon Battista Alberti's laws of linear perspective in the fifteenth century, which initiated the education of the eye that would lead to the camera obscura and the philosophical theorization by Descartes, and also to the linear literacy of the book as its counterpart.¹³ Here it may be worth quoting at length Romanyshyn's passage that explains how vision becomes centralized in Cartesian perspectival epistemology and how the body is eliminated from this scheme, in order to look back on the key issues in the overall argument of this dissertation:

Ego consciousness, consciousness as private, interior subjectivity, was initially invented and imagined by the artist as a way of envisioning the world as a matter of vision. The *cogito* of Descartes, the "I think therefore I am," begins as the eye of mind. And I say "eye of mind" because in looking at the world through a window, we are destined to lose touch with the world, except in those ways which matter for the eye alone. The eye, which of all the senses favors contact at a distance, already defines that contact in terms of its limits and its preferences. What is visible, observable, measurable, and quantifiable will increasingly become, therefore, the index of the real, while what is

¹² Romanyshyn 347.

¹³ The structure of Alberti's room and the window is practically the same as that of the camera obscura. See Romanyshyn 349-51.

invisible and not observable, qualitative, and nonmeasurable (like the beauty and awe of the rainbow which Newton will later in another closed room quantify as the spectrum) will become at best subjective, secondary quality projected onto the world now cleansed and purified of those qualities. . . . This subject with its eye upon the world is the start of the modern reign of the despotic eye, that eye of mind which in draining the world of its qualities purifies it of its substance, making it into a matter of light.¹⁴

Thus the world has become a *light matter* in both senses, of which information comes only through the eye (the window) of mind (the room); the overflowing media image is its far-off descendent.

However, when Romanyshyn describes our habitual watching of TV as a “headless” activity in which our body is exposed to non-literate, random shower of information, and therefore as a moment for “a re-presentation of the preliterate body of orality,”¹⁵ a return of the poet who was banned from the polis by Plato, his argument seems to become less convincing. This is because of the fact that our media image culture is unquestionably ocularcentric. Michael Levin also notices this weak point of Romanyshyn’s otherwise powerful argument but advocates it as follows: “We may regret the fact that television perpetuates an ocularcentric culture, but we must nevertheless understand the ways in which it also ‘revisions the eye.’”¹⁶ No one can deny that today, if one lives in a developed country, he or she is bombarded with visual images day after day on a historically unprecedented scale. Indeed, the age of the book as a main source of knowledge may be ending; it seems to be gradually but irrecoverably being taken over by other electronic resources. In this view,

¹⁴ Romanyshyn 350-51.

¹⁵ Romanyshyn 357.

¹⁶ Levin, *Modernity* 24-25.

one may as well seek a “re-presentation” of what was dismissed by the Cartesian project of modern subjectivity in the increasingly obscure boundary between book literacy and media literacy that is what is taking place now.

Here Girl with a Pearl Earring can serve as an exemplary phenomenon to suggest this tendency. A mass-reproduced image of Vermeer’s original, a poster in her room, motivated Chevalier’s book. Also, perhaps many people, including myself, had seen the film first and then got hold of the book only to feel very little frustration compared to that usually felt about a film adaptation of a literary work. The cinema’s serene, static world of visual mastery is all there in the novel, or more accurately, those features of the latter are almost thoroughly captured by the film. Inspired by a painting, Chevalier’s novel is as if written to be put into a film (the short time span between its publication in 1999 and the film release in 2003 testifies this). Our model of knowledge and visual consciousness, both of which have been centered on a book-dominated culture, are going through a transitional period, breaking into a new epoch. Many journals and articles are now accessible online, and the book itself is made electronic on the internet, as well as by a device specializing in the purpose of reading books such as Amazon Kindle, which appeared in America in 2007. To pin down the shift from the eye to the ear, literacy to orality, may be one way to understand our present culture, but one may find another important change that has a potential to challenge the despotic Cartesian eye in this move from the book to the media image.

One last episode is from my own teaching experience at a university in Japan. In a general English course, we read an article from a popular science journal, which was about the olfactory sense. The textbook had some introductory questions to ask students prior to reading the main article, and one of them happened to be: “Which of the five senses do you think is most important?” The first student answered, as I had well expected, that it is sight. But the other one said that it is the sense of touch because without it we cannot avoid danger—such as something too hot or cold that causes pain—and survive, even if we have sight. Of course there is no single right answer, and for me, these two seem to reflect the binary way of thinking which always coexists in our mind. We assent to the view that we gain most of our information about the world through the eye; but we are equipped with the ability to counter-argue a thesis, so the next moment we start asking ourselves whether it is indisputable: how does a person born blind grasp the world, for example? This is what Descartes did in Optics with the example of a blind man with two sticks. As long as vision is operating as one of the senses, our intellectual quest to discover its nature will never cease. This is the year of 2010, exactly one hundred years after the publication of Howards End. The issue of the eye which stimulated the creative imagination of Forster and Woolf seems as provocative as ever, and to see how literature, an aesthetic medium made of words but first of all processed by the eye, responds to this problem, is

likely to remain as tantalizingly complex as it always has been, even in this age of technologically enhanced cognitive neuroscience.

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